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THE DOCTRINE OF CONFESSION

IN THE

CHURCH OF ENGLAND.

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Church of England.

BY THE
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WARDEN OF THE HOUSE OF MERCY, CLEWER, BERKS ;
AND HON. CANON OF CH. CH. OXFORD.

Third Edition.

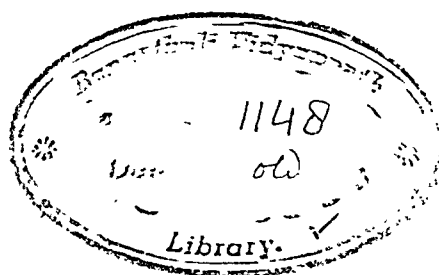
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TO THOSE,
WHETHER LIVING OR DEPARTED,
INTO WHOSE LABOURS WE HAVE ENTERED,
WHO, THROUGH EVIL REPORT AND GOOD REPORT,
HAVE WON BACK THIS LOST PORTION OF OUR INHERITANCE,
WHICH EVIL DAYS HAD FORFEITED,
SO BLESSED TO THE MANY WHO HAVE NEEDED AND HAVE FOUND
ITS HEALING VIRTUE,
THIS VOLUME
IS WITH RESPECTFUL AFFECTION
DEDICATED.

PREFACE TO THE SECOND EDITION.

IN preparing this second edition for the press, I have recast or enlarged many passages which seemed to require a clearer or fuller expression. I have also taken advantage of the criticisms, whether friendly or adverse, which the first publication of the work elicited, and which happened to fall in my way, as well as some independent publications on the subject, which have appeared since the date of the first edition. For many valuable suggestions thus obtained I am sincerely grateful. A deficiency pointed out by one friendly critic, the omission of any consideration of the Seal of Confession, I have endeavoured to supply in an additional chapter. Another deficiency, also kindly noticed, as to an important phase of opinion among our Reformers at the time of the Reformation, bearing on the subject of Confession, is briefly supplied at the end of Chapter V. My obligations as to this and other minor points, are acknowledged where the freshly inserted passages occur.

Among adverse writers, Mr. Benjamin Shaw has deservedly attracted most attention, both on account of his acuteness of reasoning, and fairness and calmness of temper.

Some of his criticisms on opinions which I had expressed, are noticed and referred to.

The most important critique which has appeared of late on the subject of Confession, on the adverse side, is the article in the January number of the "Quarterly" of this year. Some of the arguments employed I have ventured to canvass. It may, however, generally be observed, that the article, like so many popular treatises in condemnation of Confession, proceeds on a purely theoretical view of the question, and labours consequently under the objections incident to a necessarily imperfect view of the subject. Some of its statements can be answered only by an appeal to actual experience, and yet this mode of proof is of course precluded by the very circumstances of the case. Confession, not being a purely doctrinal matter, forms no exception to the axiom of modern philosophy, that in order to arrive at a reliable judgment on a practical question, some personal acquaintance with its actual working is requisite. Such adverse criticisms are not advanced by those who use Confession.

Moreover, the article repeats objections drawn from supposed results of a foreign system, which is compulsory, as equally applicable to our system, which is voluntary, no adequate allowance being made for this vital distinction. We may fairly ask that abuses among ourselves, not those supposed to exist in other countries and under different circumstances, should be urged in a controversy which relates wholly to ourselves.

Nearly five years have elapsed since this work was first published ; but I have seen no reason to alter any of the conclusions which I sought to establish in the first edition ;

or rather time has served to strengthen those conclusions, so that I have ventured to speak with greater confidence where I had before hesitated.

The rapid increase of the practice of Confession during the last four or five years, among persons of all ages and classes, and both sexes, notwithstanding all attempts to discountenance it, is a sufficient proof that this prolonged and anxious controversy has at length found its solution in the happiest and surest way—in the witness of souls innumerable, comforted, guided, strengthened, in the paths of Christian faith and virtue. Those who have been the objects of attack and suspicion, because of their advocacy of Confession, have no need to retaliate. They have already their sufficient revenge in the gratitude of the great multitude, whether in heaven or on earth, ascribing to their ministry under God the peace and joy into which they have entered, if not the very salvation of their souls.

The Catholic Church of England is at the present day on its trial to a degree unknown at any former period of its history since the Reformation. I believe it will be found more and more by all who are zealous for the development of her truest influence in winning and guiding souls to God, that to neglect, still more to disparage, or hinder the eventful ministry in question, would be one of the most fatal mistakes that could be committed.

In conclusion I desire to express my great obligation and sincere thanks to the Rev. W. E. Scudamore, of Ditchingham, for his kindness and care in revising and correcting the proofs, at least for the largest portion of them, as they passed through the press.

CLEWER RECTORY, 1869.

PREFACE TO THE THIRD EDITION.

SINCE the Second Edition of this work was issued, the subject of Confession has been still subjected to much controversy. I have however seen no reason to withdraw or modify any of the statements made, or the conclusions arrived at, in these pages. One of the consequences of the controversy was to give rise, in the year 1873, to a "Declaration" on the subject, expressive of the belief generally entertained among those whose opinion at the time was felt to be of special weight on the question. Among the signatures will be noted the honoured names of some who have since passed to their rest. The greater number are, happily, among us, still bearing witness to the truth. This Declaration is added in an Appendix, that it may be seen how far the principles advanced in these pages are in accord with what has been thus publicly put forth as the Church of England's teaching in a very carefully drawn statement attested by many witnesses.

T. T. C.

S. JOHN'S LODGE, CLEWER,
Oct., 1885.

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THE DOCTRINE OF CONFESSION

IN THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND.

PRELIMINARY CHAPTER.

NO question affecting the Church of England can be fairly considered, except by connecting together its earlier and its later history, as presenting different phases of one living body, holding in substance the same truth. For it was not the purpose of the English Reformation to ignore the traditions of the past, the changes which then took place being avowedly grounded on an appeal to an earlier standard. Its one avowed object, as the oft-repeated declarations of its leaders abundantly testify, was to correct abuses, and remove novelties of doctrine or practice, which had grown up during the middle ages at variance with primitive tradition.

It is but one instance of this fundamental principle that our existing formularies are framed upon the ancient service books of the Catholic Church. They profess to be, and are, at least in their essential features, a reconstruction of its traditionary system of Divine worship; and only on this ground they claim our allegiance.

The following declarations selected from the authoritative

documents of the period, are sufficiently conclusive on this point, and, having special reference to the changes made in the Order for the Administration of Sacraments, they bear with peculiar force on our immediate subject. In the Preamble to the Act of Edward VI., "for the Uniformity of Prayer and Administration of Sacraments," it is stated that "the Archbishop of Canterbury, with several others of the most learned Bishops and Divines, commissioned to draw up an Office for all the parts of the Divine Service were charged, that in doing this they were to have a regard to the direction of Holy Scripture and the usage of the Primitive Church."¹ The same principle is embodied in the reply given, A.D. 1551, to a letter soliciting of the king and council, on behalf of the Princess Mary, the free exercise of her religion: "We use the ceremonies, observances, and sacraments of our religion, as the Apostles and first Fathers of the Primitive Church did."² Queen Elizabeth gave the same assurance to the Emperor and foreign princes, who had interfered in favour of the ejected Bishops: "There was no new faith propagated in England; no religion set up, but that which was commanded by our SAVIOUR, practised by the Primitive Church, and unanimously approved by the Fathers of the best antiquity."³

This principle, adopted as the basis of our formularies, must of necessity also be taken as the rule of their interpretation. It would have been schismatical to establish a new system of belief or worship; for the Church of England, as a branch of the Church Catholic, could not—the Church

¹ Collier, vol. ii. p. 263, fol. edit., or vol. v. p. 306, Svo. edit.

² Wheatley, Common Prayer, Appendix to Introduction.

³ Collier, vol. ii. p. 436, fol. edit., or vol. vi. pp. 263, 264, Svo. edit. See a catena of similar passages in Mr. Heathcote's "Documentary Illustrations of the Principles to be kept in view in the interpretation of the Thirty-nine Articles."

Catholic itself cannot—construct new ordinances of grace, or alter the essential features of those originally constituted. It were no less schismatical, while retaining the ancient forms, to force on them a new meaning, for it is in effect the same thing, to invent new forms, or to use the old in a new sense.

It follows from these premises that in our present inquiry reference must needs be made to the earlier usages of the Church. And such reference will bear mainly on two points: (1) the interpretation of doubtful passages, if such there be, occurring in our formularies; and (2) the supplying answers to questions which may arise where the Church of the Reformation period is silent.

This second use of such references is equally clear as the first. For if it be granted, that the object of the Reformation was but to correct abuses, not to do away with essential primitive truth, it follows that where nothing contradictory is affirmed, the ancient rule still holds good. The only question at least would be as to practices which had been dropped, how far they could lawfully be introduced without living authority. But the Church's law has in itself an enduring force, capable of perpetual revival, until repealed by a power equal to that which established it.

In the quickenings of a deeper life which it has pleased God mercifully to awaken in us, a revived desire has been felt for the restoration of "Godly discipline," as an answer we may trust to the solemn "wish" for its restoration uttered by our Church year by year continually;¹ and many stirred by a keener sense of sin, have been drawn to seek "the benefit of absolution," and spiritual guidance, offered at all

¹ "In the Primitive Church there was a godly discipline" . . . "instead whereof, until the said discipline may be restored again, which is much to be wished," &c. *Commin. Service.*

times by our Church in her public offices, though now for many years suffered to fall into disuse.

These quickenings have led to a revived study of sacramental¹ Confession, with special anxious searchings of heart, on the part of those who desire, in their views regarding it, to adhere loyally to the teaching and spirit of our Church. Such anxiety has been the occasion of the inquiry, the results of which are embodied in the following pages.

On a question of such acknowledged importance, no apology, the writer trusts, is needed for adding yet one more to the many treatises which have already appeared. What is here offered does not profess to contain any fresh matter or novel interpretations. It is simply an attempt to arrange in order, and present as a connected whole, facts and arguments more or less familiar to every one who has studied the points in dispute. Little indeed that is new can be added to the mass of materials, bearing on the subject, which have, from time to time, been brought forward in explanation of the mind of the Church of England in this matter, and only through the aid thus provided could the writer have ventured to undertake this work. He is most grateful to those whose previous labours have accumulated references and quotations of the utmost value, which constant pressure of active duty would have prevented his obtaining without such assistance. In availing himself of such aid his earnest desire has been to regulate his conclusions by the consensus of authorities to which we have been accustomed to look, as the truest exponents of the Church side in the doctrinal controversies of the last

¹ "Sacramental confession" means "confession made to a Priest," as distinguished from confession made direct to GOD; so named, because of the grace promised to accompany the act of the Priesthood in the remission of sins. The term is so interpreted by Bishop Cosin in a passage subsequently quoted.

three centuries, and he would wish to retract by anticipation any opinion here expressed which can be proved to be at variance with their collective judgment. If in dealing with this much vexed subject he has advanced anything which needlessly disturbs, or tends to strife, he would most truly deplore such a result. A question touching so closely the finer elements and keener sensibilities of the secret life of devout souls, if not tenderly and considerately handled, must itself suffer, as well as cause sorest woundings where one would most desire to promote peace. Such an inquiry, however, need not of itself involve such a result. A clear understanding of its true bearings, and of the principles by which they must be determined, as well as their relations to other kindred doctrines, would naturally tend rather to quietness and confidence, if not by the removal of ungrounded apprehensions and suspicions, at least by showing the honesty of purpose with which the disputed doctrine or practice is vindicated.

It will be a ground of deepest thankfulness, if any of the explanations or arguments here advanced serve in any degree to save those who use Confession from the charge of undutifulness and disloyalty to the rule of the Communion to which they owe obedience, or to guard them against the temptation to disparage such as are seeking to live to God, perhaps with equal devotion, only by other means. Both they who use and they who do not use Confession, may find within the Church of England ample assistance and encouragement for their respective spiritual needs, and thus may strive together in love for their common hope in the Gospel. For while we cannot too earnestly desire that all who have sinned grievously against grace, so as to hinder peaceful communion with their LORD, should be led, according to all true ancient precedent, to ensure their restoration by Confession and the grace of Absolution, we may trust

that, for others who have not so sinned, the freedom of choice allowed among us may be helpful, whether Confession be used or not,—the recommendation of its use, on the one hand, tending to promote self-distrust in those who use it not, by the constant suggestion of its possible need, and, on the other hand, the encouragement given to the soul's secret intercourse with GOD alone, acting as a warning to those who use Confession, against its possible abuse in the loss of the consciousness of personal responsibility, or defect as to personal effort.

Further, the writer would rejoice, if in days when such a strong tendency exists to distrust the Church of England's power to provide for the inner needs of the soul, and to disparage her rule and principles in contrast with the powerful system pressing upon her so closely, from which nevertheless she is unhappily at present constrained to stand apart,—if at such a time he should succeed in convincing any thus in doubt, that there were at the time of the Reformation overwhelming reasons for a change in the penitential discipline which then prevailed in England; and moreover, that after making all fair allowance for the difficulties unavoidably attending any attempts to rule and systematise matters so closely touching the inner life, where liberty is most forcibly claimed, and can be most effectually asserted by every man within the fence of his own conscience,—the Church of England has nevertheless, through God's blessing, held her way wisely and considerately amidst most perplexed, entangled controversies, while yet she has carefully secured adequate means alike for release from guilt, and for the promotion of a manly piety, insisting on the use of Confession as far as is consistent with the purest traditions of antiquity, and withholding a more absolute rule only because experience has sufficiently proved, that in the present temper of men's minds, occasioned in no

small degree by the very enforcement of a more authoritative system during the ages preceding the Reformation, such a course would but provoke a reaction more detrimental to piety than the present abeyance of the Church's legitimate discipline, sad as its consequences unquestionably are; and the more so, because such discipline, where it is attempted, can be upheld only by motives and doctrines having, as we think, no sufficient warrant in the Divine revelation "once delivered" to us, for which the Church was charged by the Apostles to "contend earnestly."

CHAPTER I.

THE TESTIMONY OF HOLY SCRIPTURE.

THE relief of a burdened conscience by the open acknowledgment of its guilt, is an instinct of natural piety. The recorded intercourse of Almighty God with the first penitents of our race implied it.¹ His appearing to Adam and Eve in visible Form, and by questioning leading them to open declaration of their transgression, and again to Cain, with the same object in view—involves the principle of Confession in its simplest rudiments. That the principle became established, as a law of nature, seems proved by the fact, that there is no express enactment establishing Confession in the Mosaic law; there are only regulations which manifestly imply a previously existing use. Confession resembles in this respect many other ordinances among the Israelites, which, taking their rise in an unknown antiquity, were adopted and sealed with a new authority in the Law. Thus, e.g., sacrifice was instituted as soon as sin had been

¹ “The LORD GOD called vnto Adam, and said unto him, Where art thou? . . . Who told thee that thou wast naked? Hast thou eaten of the tree, &c. ? . . . And the LORD GOD said unto the woman, What is this that thou hast done? . . . And the LORD said unto Cain, Where is Abel thy brother? . . . What hast thou done?”—Gen. iii. 9—13; iv. 9, 10. In each case the acknowledgment of the transgression, though already clearly marked by the all-seeing eye of GOD, must be drawn forth from the lips of the transgressor, thus forced to condemn himself before his pardon could be sealed.

committed,¹ though its institution is not recorded ; only in later ages it was reduced to an elaborate system in the detailed appointments of the Levitical ritual. Confession was always closely connected with sacrifice in the provisions of the Law, and on this account likewise would be looked for as an original institution, coeval with the first penitential act of fallen humanity.

Hooker thus briefly explains the practice of Confession according to the regulations of the Mosaic Covenant. "The Law imposed upon them (the Israelites) that special Confession which they in their books called confession of that particular fault, for which we namely seek pardon at God's hands. The words of the Law concerning Confession in this kind are as followeth : 'When a man or woman shall commit any sin that men commit, and transgress against the LORD, their sin which they have done,' (that is to say, the very deed itself in particular,) 'they shall acknowledge,' (Numb. v. 6.) In Leviticus, after certain transgressions there mentioned, we read the like ; 'When a man hath sinned in any one of these things, he shall then confess how in that thing he hath offended,' (Lev. v. 5.) For such kind of special sins they had also special sacrifices, wherein their manner was, that the offender should lay his hand on the head of the sacrifice which he brought, and should there make confession to God, saying; 'Now, O LORD, that I have offended, committed sin, and done wickedly in Thy sight, this and this being my fault ; behold, I repent me, and am utterly ashamed of my doings ; my purpose is never to return more to the same crime.' Finally, there was no man amongst them at any time, either condemned to suffer death, or corrected, or chastised with stripes, nor even sick and

¹ For evidence in proof of this statement, see Magee on the "Atone-ment," and Mr. Freeman's "Principles of Divine Service," vol. ii., passim.

near his end, but they called upon him to repent and confess his sins. Of malefactors convicted by witnesses, and thereupon adjudged to die, or otherwise chastised, their custom was to exact, as Joshua did of Achan, open confession; 'My son, give glory to the LORD GOD of Israel, confess unto Him, and declare unto me what thou hast committed, conceal it not from me.'"¹

The Levitical Law is most express as to the necessity of special cleansing after special sins. The Law could indeed provide no remedy for sins of a deadly character, and of these therefore there is no mention; but of such as fell within its limited scope, the enumeration is sufficiently full to show the universal application of these remedial provisions. They applied both to the clergy and people alike, and to people of the highest equally as to those of a lower social grade. Be it observed, moreover, that neither the solemn paschal offering, nor the annual day of atonement, any more than the regular morning and evening oblations, sufficed for the cleansing of these special sins of individuals. Each separate offender, however faithfully he might join in the regular oblations in union with the congregation, must nevertheless seek his own special cure through sacrifices of atonement applied to his particular case.

Thus, "if the priest that is anointed, do sin according to the sin of the people; then let him bring for his sin which he hath sinned a young bullock without blemish unto the LORD for a sin-offering,"² &c. "When a ruler hath sinned, and done somewhat through ignorance against any of the commandments of the LORD his GOD, . . . and is guilty; or if his sin wherein he hath sinned, come to his knowledge, he shall bring his offering,"³ &c. "And if any one of the

¹ Eccles. Pol., l. vi. c. iv. 4, or vol. iii. part 1, p. 23, (Keble's Edit.)

² Lev. iv. 3, &c.

³ Ver. 22, &c.

common people sin through ignorance, while he doeth somewhat against any of the commandments of the LORD and be guilty ; or if his sin, which he hath sinned, come to his knowledge : then he shall bring his offering,"¹ &c. "If a soul sin, and hear the voice of swearing if he do not utter it," &c. ; "if a soul touch any unclean thing," &c. ; "or if a soul swear, pronouncing with his lips to do evil, or to do good," &c. ; "and it shall be, when he shall be guilty in one of these things, that he shall confess that he hath sinned in that thing, and he shall bring his trespass offering unto the LORD for his sin,"² &c.

These special personal cleansings through special personally applied sacrifices were thus, in each case, superadded to the regular ordinances in which penitents might be joined together with the assembled congregation. These special sacrificial rites met the needs of individual souls, maintaining their personal hold continually on the One true Atonement, and ensuring their beneficial reception of the public ordinances. A man's fellowship with the Congregation of Israel was not enough to ensure his personal interest in the benefits of the Atonement, without an individual application of its virtues through such special and appropriate remedies. The typical bearing of these provisions on the Gospel life, which the Law foreshadowed, is clear, viz., that individual ministrings accompanied by confession of the fault are equally to be looked for by us, as the efficacious means for the personal application of the promised grace.

Confession bears to the Christian system precisely the same relation that it bore to the Mosaic Covenant. No express enactment appointed it. It is not mentioned among the new ordinances of the Spirit. But it appears at the very

¹ Lev. iv. 27, &c.

² Lev. v. 1—10.

opening of the Gospel, as a practice already existing, a fixed universal law, a feeling, the natural expression of penitence, which taken up into the Christian life was thus again stamped with a new Divine authority.¹ The commission² of the Christian Priesthood, "Whosoever sin ye remit," &c., did not institute, but in itself implicitly involved, the practice of Confession. This appears to be an unavoidable conclusion; for, having been required throughout the Mosaic dispensation as a necessary condition for such remission of sin as could then be bestowed, its continuance in a similar connexion with the corresponding, but more perfect, ministry of reconciliation under the new dispensation, would be understood to be implied, unless expressly excluded. The type interprets the antitype.

This critical text, moreover, proves the obligations and use of Confession for a more convincing and more vital reason. Such a commission could not possibly be exercised in its direct personal application to individual souls, with assurance to them of such application, unless their secret state were sufficiently known to the Priest to enable him to form a judgment as to their fitness; and such knowledge could not ordinarily be had without Confession. On this ground Bishop Cosin, commenting on the first Exhortation in the Communion Office, observes that "confession of sins must necessarily be made to them to whom the dispensation of the mysteries of God is committed," and quotes S.

¹ Thus, e.g., we read :—"John did baptize in the wilderness, and preach the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins. And there went out unto him all the land of Judæa, and they of Jerusalem, and were all baptized of him in the river of Jordan, confessing their sins."—S. Mark i. 4, 5.

² The Council of Trent grounds the absolute necessity of Confession on this commission, but for a different reason. See chap. iii., where this difference is explained.

Basil adducing New Testament authority for the statement : "For so they which in former times repented among the saints, are said to have done. It is written in the Gospel that they confessed their sins unto S. John Baptist.¹ (S. Matt. iii. 6.) In the Acts they all confessed their sins unto the Apostles, of whom they were baptized. (Acts xix. 18.)" Cosin adds S. Augustine's application of a passage of S. Paul : "He that willingly judgeth himself, lest against his will he be judged of the LORD, let him come to the priests, by whom the keys are ministered unto him in the Church, and receive of them that have the oversight of the Sacraments, the manner of his satisfaction."² But on the application of the priestly commission to our subject, more will be said in the course of this work.

The cardinal text, however, which of all others in the New Testament bears most fully on the subject, is that of S. James : "Is any sick among you? let him call for the elders of the Church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the Name of the LORD; and the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the LORD shall raise him up; and if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him. Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another,

¹ S. John Baptist not being a priest, yet receiving confessions, is not to be regarded as an exception to a general rule. He was acting in accordance with Jewish custom, as a prophet gathering together disciples about to devote themselves to a new and advanced form of life. Lange says : "It was his mission to restore the community as members of the old economy, in order to present them pure and set apart for the transition into the kingdom of heaven. What he required of the people was in perfect accordance with that mission. Each individual was to purify himself as an Israelite, to change his mind in earnest repentance, and in consequence to put away the evil of his life," &c. Lange's *Life of CHRIST*. Part iii., sec. 11. (John the Baptist.) Clark : Edinburgh.

² Notes on the Book of Common Prayer, Cosin's works, vol. v. p. 9. Library of Anglo-Catholic Theology.

that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much."¹

It has been urged, that this injunction, expressed, as it is, only in general terms, refers to the acknowledgment of faults by one man to another under any circumstances, and is therefore to be regarded as wholly irrespective of a priestly ministry. That the passage has a general application, including all modes of confession, may readily be granted, but it can scarcely be questioned, that its primary and special reference is to the exercise of an appointed ministry. The injunction to confess, is given in intimate connection with the order to "call for the elders of the Church." The penitent's being "healed," the declared consequence of confession and prayer, is represented as identical with his "sins being forgiven him," in the preceding verse. Accordingly our best ritualists have understood sacerdotal absolution to be here intended. "Absolution," says Dean Comber, "seems to be positively enjoined by S. James to be given to the sick penitent by the priest that comes to pray over him ; for the Apostle adds, 'and if he have committed sins, remission or absolution shall be given him,' which is the right translation of the impersonal word used in the original, and the practice of the primitive Church (the best of commentaries) confirms this exposition, they being always wont to grant absolution to all sorts of penitents lying in danger of death."² Comber, moreover, is of opinion, that the expression, "a righteous man," is used by S. James in this passage as synonymous with "a minister of God." The phrase, one to another, he adds, "may seem to allow us to confess to any, yet the use of those words elsewhere assures us that they are to be limited according to the preceding matter ; so 'be subject one to another' is meant only of inferiors to

¹ S. James v. 13—16.

² Fol. 750. Quoted by Stretton, "Guide to the Infirm, &c."

superiors, and 'use hospitality one to another,' is meant only of the rich to the poor, even as here 'confess one to another,' is the people to 'the elders of the Church,' for to them only CHRIST committed the power of binding and loosing, and 'when a man is overtaken in a fault, he that is spiritual must restore him;' and this was so received a doctrine in the primitive times, that the confession of sins to a priest, in the case of a troubled conscience, was esteemed an Apostolical constitution."¹

Bishop Wilson takes the same view of the passage, grounding his interpretation on the authority of Hammond: "If we have committed sins against God, these are to be confessed to the elders of the Church, and ἀφεθήσεται αὐτοῦ; he shall be absolved, or absolution shall be given him (Hammond), i.e., upon his confession."² Marshall also confirms this interpretation, referring to the system of clinical confession, i.e., confession of the sick, in the primitive Church, with which in his judgment this passage closely corresponds. "Considering the known usage of the penitential confession, which was indeed a confession to one another, i.e., a confession in the face of the Church, I cannot help understanding S. James as having here in his view the process of clinical penance." "According to S. James the course was this: some elder of the Church was to be called for, and was to offer up the prayer of the persons then present on the behalf of the sick, who, for his own part was exhorted to confess his sins in the presence of that elder and of the other bystanders, and thus all in their turns were to confess their faults to each other, whenever this occasion shall call them to it. These passages are all apparently connected, and have a mutual relation; and the whole pro-

¹ On the Offices, pp. 309, 310.

² Notes on the Holy Scripture, Bishop Wilson's works. Lib. of Anglo-Cath. Theol., vol. v. 667.

cess of this affair, as here represented, was exactly agreeable to the practice which afterwards succeeded. Nor is there anything extraordinary in the passage of S. James, which was not afterwards adopted into the standing usages of the Church, except only what related to the miraculous cure of the distemper."¹

Bingham² indeed quotes S. Augustine, to prove that the Apostle's injunction refers to confession of a fault by one Christian man to another. But it does not follow, because the passage admits this wide interpretation, that it has not also the special intention of confession to a Priest. Jeremy Taylor takes the same wide view of the passage, as generally applicable to all kinds of confession, and yet considers it to have a specific bearing on sacramental confession. "S. James," he says, "gives an express precept, that we Christians should confess our sins to each other, that is, Christian to Christian, brother to brother, the people to their minister; and then he makes a specification of that duty which a sick man is to do when he hath sent for the elders of the Church."³

¹ Marshall, Penitential Discipline of the Primitive Church, p. 81. Library of Anglo-Cath. Theol.

² Orig. Eccl. l. xviii., ch. iii. sec. v.

³ Holy Dying. Exhortation to move a sick man to confession, s. 20. Roman Divines generally deny the application of this passage to sacramental confession. An obvious motive tends to produce this bias; for ordinary Roman teaching assumes, that private Confession, as now practised, is the original institution ordained by our LORD, the public penance a later introduction, supposed to rest only on Church authority. If the passage of S. James applies at all to confession to a Priest, it must be to the public penance, because the presence of many joining in the intercession for the sick penitent is described. It would follow from hence, that the public system is meant, and if so, this must be the original institution. Hooker quotes Cajetan, as "denying that any other confession is meant than only that which seeketh either association of prayers, or reconciliation and pardon of wrongs;" and he adds, that

Holy Scripture therefore deals with the question of Confession in the most general terms, affirming its principle, and Divine origin, but defining nothing as to the occasions, the extent, or the details of its practice. Whether it should be public only, or both public and private, and in what cases, under what conditions, and within what limits, it should be practised, and what are its due results,—all such debateable points are left undetermined. For their solution we must refer to the usages of the Church, the ground and principle of the ordinance being embodied in the Divine law, but its application entrusted to the decision of Ecclesiastical Councils, and the wisdom and experience of those to whom from age to age the cure of souls has been committed.

“the greatest part” of Roman divines consider it “uncertain” whether sacramental confession is meant. Yet Bellarmine takes the opposite view, and uses the passage in support of Confession. *De Pœnit. C. iii. c. 4*, referred to by Hooker. Hooker himself sets the text aside as arguing nothing in favour of sacramental Confession, so far coinciding with the majority of Roman divines, but being in this at variance with the stream of authority among our own, of whom some noted instances are given in the text. *Eccl. Pol. l. vi. ch. iv. 5*.

CHAPTER II.

THE TESTIMONY OF ANTIQUITY.

THE penitential discipline, or as it was technically termed, the "Exomologesis"¹ of the primitive Church is thus briefly described by Hooker. "There was," he says, "first the offender's intimation of those crimes to some one Presbyter, for which imposition of penance was sought; secondly, the undertaking of penance imposed by the Bishop; thirdly, after the same performed and ended, open confession to God in the hearing of the whole Church; whereupon ensued the prayer of the whole Church, then the Bishop's imposition of hands, and so the party's reconciliation, or restitution to his former right in the holy Sacraments."² Bingham quotes S. Cyprian to show that the reconciliation of penitents on a death-bed was administered in the same manner, only the accustomed penance was dispensed,³ on condition, however, that it should be afterwards performed in case of recovery.

Hooker's account shows that the public penance involved

¹ The term literally means "confession" or "open declaration;" but it was generally used to include the whole course of public penance. Etymologically it implies public, rather than private, confession; *ἐξομολογέω*, confiteor, Mark i., Matth. iii. Item palam profiteor et prædico, Esai. xlv., Psal. xviii. Item spondeo, i.e., dico me facturum, polliceor, Luc. xxii. Scap. Lex.

² Eccles. Pol. l. vi. ch. iv. sec. 13.

³ Eccles. Ant. l. xix. ch. v. sec. 4.

previous private confession, made either for the purpose of determining whether public penance was necessary, or to obtain advice for its due performance. And this private confession was therefore necessarily, as Marshall observes, full and minute. "The party who thus confessed his private offences, must have opened them at large, or else the penitentiary" (or confessor) "could not judge of them, whether they needed such a cure or no."¹ Marshall moreover makes the important assertion, that in the earliest times there was no private Confession, except in connexion with the public discipline. It was made, as he shows, either because the sin committed needed public penance, or else to relieve the mind of the penitent from the fear of having committed such sin. "It is true that all who mention the confession of secret sins, do it still with some eye of reference to public discipline. This Origen, Tertullian, and S. Cyprian, do all, as far as I can judge, agree in."²

Morinus,³ who, of all theologians of the Latin Church,

¹ Marshall's Penit. Discipline, p. 39. Lib. Anglo-Cath. Theol.

² Perrone, indeed, assumes a contrary view, asserting in opposition to the Jansenists, that private, or "sacramental," penance is to be distinguished from the public discipline as to their respective origin, the former alone, according to him, being appointed by our LORD, and therefore necessary, the latter by the Church in the course of the third century. But Perrone, be it noted, gives no proof whatever of such a distinction, nor does he refer to any ancient authority in support of his statement. He assumes a different historical order of events, indeed the very reverse of that which is here proved to have been the real order, supposing private to have preceded public penance; and represents the changes which the practice of Confession underwent in the course of time, as marks of a difference in kind. His bias is evident, to lower public and canonical penance, in order to exalt, and show the divine necessity of, the private ministry in contrast to the former. Tract. de Pœnit. c. iv. sec. 218, 219.

³ Morinus's great work, *De Sacramento Pœnitentiæ*, was first published in Paris, 1651. A later edition, inferior as to correctness, ap-

has the most fully treated the whole subject of Confession, also supports this view. He shows in his elaborate exposition of the subject, that there was in the beginning but one tribunal of penance, and that this only gradually after many centuries branched off into two courts,—the “forum externum,” or court of Ecclesiastical discipline, and the “forum internum,” or secret confession to a Priest—as they exist in the present practice of the Church. Morinus further asserts it to be a fact, “clear as the midday light,” that the many exhortations to Penance occurring in the writings of the Fathers relate always to the public canonical discipline.¹

Among various authorities for this assertion, he quotes S. Augustine to prove that, in his day, public penance being allowed only once in a lifetime, if this failed to effect its object, the relapsed person was left to the mercy of God, no allusion being made to any separate private tribunal of penance as still open to him,² and implying therefore that no such alternative then existed. The dispute concerned only the more grievous sins, for they alone, as will afterwards be seen, fell within the scope of the Exomologesis, lesser sins being dealt with in private Confession, without either the public discipline, or the formal absolution of the Church. Morinus adds the important circumstance that in

peared in 1682, at Antwerp. Morinus was a Frenchman, a member of the congregation of the Oratory.

¹ “Hæc omnia luce meridiana fulgentius ostendunt S. Ambrosius cæterique patres, quum toties pœnitentiæ actiones urgent, ad solemnem vel saltem canonicam respexisse.” L. iv., c. vii. xi.

² “Fatetur quoque Augustinus semel tantum humilem illam pœnitentiam concedi An recurrit Augustinus ad solvendam Macedonii objectionem ad iteratam sed privatim pœnitentiam, quæ erat propositio, si ex usu fuisset, ad objectionis dissolutionem expeditissime? Longa est Epistola (Epis. 54); varia in ea tractantur, et retractantur, sed de hac re ne verbum quidem. Ad Dei misericordiam confugit semper. Unicum remedium post actam publice pœnitentiam proponit,

primitive times Absolution was not given except in public,¹ a fact indeed necessarily implied in the above statement, because Absolution being the reconciliation of the penitent following upon the due performance of Penance, if the one were only publicly administered, the same must be the case with the other, at least in the case of the whole,—special provision being always made, as has been already shown, for the dying.

Dr. Pusey maintains the same position with an overwhelming mass of evidence, proving, moreover, this momentous point in the questions pending between us and Rome, that the main stress laid by the Fathers was on “the act of public penance,” not on “mere confession.”

Dr. Pusey defines the “Exomologesis” to be “a course of public penance, whereby the penitent humbles himself before God.” “Confession,” he adds, “is rather incidentally involved in it (in that such a course could not be entered upon without it,) than an integral part of it, or required for its own sake.” “The point at issue,” as he observes, “between the Romanists and ourselves as to Confession, relates (as themselves admit) not to its general advantage, or its necessity in particular cases, or its use as a means of discipline, or the desirableness of public confession before the whole Church, or the great difficulty of true penitence often without it, or the duty of individuals to comply with it, if the Church require it; but it is whether confession to men be so essential to absolution that the benefit of absolution cannot be had without it.” “Public penitence implies confession before man, in part also to the

ad hoc amplectandum criminis Poenitentes tantum exhortantur. Ad secundam vero poenitentiam privatim aut publice ab Ecclesia propositam, nunquam.” L. v. cxxx., s. iv.

¹ “Nam si Poenitentia negatur, multo magis absolutio, cum Poenitentia tantum imperetur, ut absolutionem impetret.” Ib. s. ix.

priest, who had to decide whether certain cases required a course of public penitence or no ; it implied that the penitent at the close of his public penitence, and before his re-admission to communion, should bewail his sins before the priest in presence of the congregation, and receive absolution from him ; since also this was the prescribed discipline of the Church, one who withdrew himself from it, for fear of the public shame, had reason to fear that he shrunk also from the necessary discipline of humiliation. Again, the penitent by shrinking from public penitence, lost the continual intercessions of the congregation." "The Roman theologians insist on private confession as essential, on the authority of the Fathers, when these are insisting on public humiliation, or on private, with a view to public, confession, and this of flagrant overt sins of a more deadly nature."

Dr. Pusey thus sums up the objects of Confession, as held of old : "In all the places in which the Fathers speak of the necessity of confession, they have regard to it, (1) as the door to a course of public penance which humbled the penitent, subjected him to a healthful discipline (which, privately, it was to be feared, few would practise,) and kept him for a while from the Holy Communion which might be hurtful to him ; (2) as obtaining for individuals spiritual counsel for the specific case of each ; (3) as gaining the intercession of the Church, and so of CHRIST."¹

Two facts are clearly thus established, (1) that the original

¹ Notes L. and M. on Tertullian, vol. i. pp. 377—380. Library of the Fathers. These most valuable disquisitions, on the term "Exomologesis," and on the "absolute necessity of Confession," ought to be carefully studied by any one desirous of understanding with accuracy the detailed view of the teaching of the Fathers, and the precise meaning of the terms they were accustomed to use on these vexed points of primitive practice.

penitential system, the only one known to the Church of the primitive ages, was the public discipline ; (2) that private Confession was then in frequent use, but only in connexion with the public discipline, and not as a means of obtaining private Absolution.

Nothing is intended to be implied in what has been said, as to the comparative frequency of public or private Confession. The only point insisted on is the dependence of the private on the public system, and therefore its subordination to it. Private Confession must necessarily have been the more frequent of the two, if only from the fact that it might be made when no public penance followed. Of the amount of frequency no judgment can be formed, except by estimating the influences tending to promote it, and the encouragement given to it by the clergy. Hooker says, "Private and voluntary repentance (under which term he includes Confession) was of far more general use, whereas public was incident unto few, and not oftener than once incident to any."¹ A well known passage of Origen proves, that private Confession was encouraged whenever the mind was disturbed with the fear of deadly sin, but still only with reference to the possible need of public penance. "Consider," he says, "what the Holy Scripture teaches us, that we ought not to conceal our sin within our own breast. For perhaps, as they who are inwardly oppressed with the humour or phlegm of undigested meat, which lies heavy upon the stomach, if they vomit it up, are relieved ; so they who have sinned, if they hide and conceal their sin within themselves, are inwardly oppressed and almost suffocated with the phlegm and humour of sin ; but if any become his

¹ Eccl. Pol. l. vi. c. iv. s. 11 ; or vol. iii. pt. 1, p. 52, Keble's Edit. Some are of opinion that public penance might be repeated, but *not for the same sin*, or an offence of the same kind. (See Marshall, p. 23.)

own accuser, and confess his sin, in so doing, he, as it were, vomits up his sin, or rejects and removes the cause of his distemper. Try first the physician to whom thou art to reveal the cause of thy distemper, and see that he be one who knows how to be weak with him that is weak, and to weep with him that weeps ; one who understands the discipline of condoling and compassionating ; that so at length if he shall say anything who hath first showed himself to be both a skilful and a merciful physician, and give thee any counsel, thou mayest cleave and follow it. If he discern and foresee thy distemper to be such as will need to be declared and cured in the full assembly of the Church, whereby others perhaps may be edified, and thou thyself healed ; this is to be done with great deliberation and the prudent advice of such a physician."¹ Bingham refers to S. Gregory of Nyssa, S. Basil, &c., for similar teaching.²

2. Further, whatever may have been the amount of frequency with which private Confession was practised, it is clear that, with the exception at least of overt and grievous sins, to which the public discipline properly applied, it was strictly voluntary. The public discipline could be enforced according to the canons, on pain of excommunication. Sins for which it was due, if notorious, might be charged on the offender by the Priest acting on his own knowledge, or on the information of others ; and such sins would consequently become the subject matter of Confession, as part of the enforced discipline, and so far necessary ; but secret or unknown sins, and sins of thought, were confessed, or not, at the will of the offender.

It is unnecessary to multiply evidence on this point after

¹ Homil. ii. on Ps. xxxvii., quoted by Bingham, Eccl. Ant. l. xviii. ch. iii. sec. 8.

² Ibid. l. xviii. ch. iii. sec. 7.

the full array of quotations adduced by Dr. Pusey. A few instances will suffice to show the weight of proof bearing upon it. Dr. Pusey quotes, among other Fathers, Origen, "who distinguishes sins into two classes, one for which public penitence was done, and there was public excommunication ; the other (mental sins) came under the cognizance of God only, and the sinner is by Him excommunicated by the withdrawal of His HOLY SPIRIT," (Hom. 2, in Jud. § 5,) —S. Augustine, who distinguishes from the sins figured by the death of Lazarus, "a grievous wound, deadly, mortal," sins of concupiscence, of those "who have the sin within, in the heart, not as yet in deed," and these having sinned within, are, he says, "like Jairus's daughter, raised within. This resurrection of the soul takes place within, in the secret places of the conscience," (Serm. 98, in Luc. vii. § 5,) healed, i.e., without Confession, within the soul by CHRIST Himself ;—S. Cyprian (de Laps. civ.,) who "praised those who did penance for, and therewith confessed, the thought of denying the faith, implying that they were not ecclesiastically bound so to do ;"—S. Chrysostom, exhorting thus, "But now it is not even necessary to confess 'before witnesses. Be the examination of transgression in the thoughts of conscience, be the judgment seat unwitnessed, let God alone see thee confessing, God Who upbraideth not sins, but remitteth sins on confession,"—passages which, as Dr. Pusey observes, are altogether inconsistent with any law or custom of compulsory confession.¹

3. According to the ancient penitential system sins were classified under three heads. The twofold division into mortal and venial sins belonged to a later period. The earlier classification was into sins grievous, sins most

¹ See Note M. on "the Absolute Necessity of Confession," *passim*, specially p. 379.

grievous, and sins less grievous.¹ Idolatry, adultery, and homicide, were generally held to form the most grievous class.² Sins considered to be of less magnitude, which yet would be included under the general and indefinite term, deadly, were placed in the second class. Faults, the incursions of which are felt more or less by all, constituted the third, or less grievous, class. Corresponding with these three classes of sins, there were three different modes of spiritual healing. Sins of the first class alone were by the canons necessarily subject to the public discipline, although Penance was often voluntarily undergone for sins of the second class. Morinus quotes S. Augustine (*de fide et operibus, ad fin.*) thus briefly distinguishing the ordinary modes of dealing with the three classes of sin; "The first is chastised (*plectitur*) by penance; the second by brotherly correction; the third and lightest, without which this life cannot be passed" . . . "the daily prayer of the faithful reconciles (*satisfacit.*)"³ Morinus also quotes S. Pacian, as

¹ "Antiqui Christiani, quantum legendo et conjiciendo possunt assequi, peccata in tres tantum classes distinguebant, levia, gravia, et gravissima, quibus purgandis, et castigandis tria tantum constituerunt pœnarum, sive alexipharacorum, genera." Morir. l. iv. c. ii.

² The first class, or most grievous sins, were also called "capital," sometimes "mortal," sometimes "canonical," as being specially the subject matter of canonical discipline. Ibid. l. v. c. i. ii. There were certain variations in different places, or ages. E.g., S. Cyprian reckons as the three, "adultery, fraud, homicide," (*de Pat. c. 9*;) S. Augustine "murders, thefts, adulteries" (*iv. 22 in Joann.*) Note M. in Tertul.

³ L. iv. c. vii. iv. S. Augustine's words quoted by Morinus, relate to the *first* class of sins: "Est pœnitentia gravior, et luctuosior, in qua proprie vocantur in Ecclesiâ pœnitentes, etiam remoti a sacramento altaris participando, ne accipiendo indignè iudicium sibi manducent et bibant. . . . Adulterium forte commissum est, forte homicidium, forte aliquid sacrilegium. Gravis res, grave vulnus, iethale, mortiferum, sed omnipotens medicina." . . . Of the *second* class: "Item si essent quædam non eâ humilitate pœnitentiæ sananda, qualis in Ecclesiâ datur

to the different remedies for the first and second classes of sin. "First, there are three deadly or capital sins, for which canonical and public penance is undergone, to which forgiveness is imparted only with great difficulty after many labours have been borne. Secondly, other sins in their own nature deadly, i.e., deserving hell and everlasting death, but not specified in the canons, and for which, therefore, that same laborious penance was not imposed, are healed by the counteraction (compensatione) of the opposite virtues. Not but that this same healing was required in case of the three greater sins, but the Fathers held that, besides the remedies common to them with all other deadly sins, they needed other more efficacious, more laborious and more solemn modes of cure, known as the Penance."¹ He also quotes S. Augustine, speaking more fully of the remedies of the third class of sins: "Sins which are not mortal, every one easily cures for himself by the recitation of the LORD'S Prayer, and other good work,"² "smiting the breast, giving of alms, a good disposition of heart towards God, and like actions,"³ being in another place specified as ordinary uses.

4. Penance in those earlier times always preceded absolution, the direct reverse of the later and modern use. Its object, as at first understood, differed materially from the view which subsequently prevailed. It was imposed as a means of deepening repentance, and a test of its genuine-

eis qui proprie pœnitentes vocantur, sed quibusdam correctionum medicamentis." Of the *third* class of sins: "De quotidianis autem brevibus, levibusque peccatis, sine quibus hæc vita non ducitur, quotidiana oratio fidelium satisfacit. Delet omnino hæc oratio minima et quotidiana peccata."

¹ L. v. c. xxxi. sec. 8.

² Ibid. sec. 9.

³ L. v. c. i. sec. 2.

ness—a curative or remedial process for chastening and correcting the disorders of the life. Its publicity formed a large part of its severity, and therefore of its value in humbling the penitent. It was not considered to be essential for the remission of sins, (in clinical repentance it was dispensed,) but as a discipline, partly for the correction of the penitent, partly for the sake of warning and example to others. “The Church for this reason instituted the stations of penitence, and exercised penitents with various labours and inflictions, not merely as punishments, but also in order that the wounds of the soul caused by sin might be healed by them, as by medicines, and that it might be judged by the fulfilment of these external actions, how far the sin was healed.”¹ Morinus shows by accumulated evidence that this principle obtained, and a corresponding rule ordinarily was observed throughout the first seven centuries, exceptions being allowed only in special cases.² Thus, e.g., as he notes, after the Montanist and Novatian heresies had extended their influence, and the Church was forced by their stern criticism and rivalry to impose severer and longer penances, it was not uncommon, as a merciful mitigation of the newly enacted Canons, to give absolution, while yet some portion of the Penance remained to be fulfilled. Or, on the other hand, the fear of precipitating a penitent, too weak to bear the Penance, into schism, might lead the Priest altogether to dispense with it. Moreover, as the private system of dealing with penitents gradually superseded the public, a change to be hereafter more fully spoken of, if the Priest was satisfied of the sincerity of the penitent, he might be disposed to absolve at once, the effect of Penance as an example to others having ceased with the cessation of its publicity, and consequently its influence on the penitent alone needing to be considered.

¹ Lib. ix. c. v. sec. 13.

² L. ix. c. iii. 1.

These, however, were manifestly exceptions to the general rule, and were allowed only as dispensations, in trust that the repentance was sincere, the principle, equally as before, holding good, that penance was remedial, counteracting the effects of sin, and preparing the soul for a perfect reconciliation with God.

From this view of Penance, "the Fathers," as Morinus remarks, "much more frequently employed the term 'medici,' than 'judices,' in reference to Priests, and spoke of penitential labours as medicines, imposed for the health of the soul, rather than as punishments."¹ He quotes Maldonatus, as allowing that "the ancient Fathers very sparingly and seldom mention punishment, as the object of penance; and that whenever they speak of satisfaction, it is not for punishment (pro poenâ,) but for sin (pro culpâ.)"² The importance of noting and distinguishing this, the patristic, view of the object of Penance, will be evident, when we come to consider the mediæval system.

5. The term "satisfaction" frequently occurs in the writings of the Fathers, in connexion with Penance. But it is most important to remark, that the Fathers did not employ the term in the sense which it acquired in the theology and popular use of later centuries. Dr. Pusey says; "The words 'satisfacere,' 'satisfactio,' when used of works of repentance, have not in the Fathers any technical sense, as in recent Romish theology, as though the sinner

¹ L. iii. c. xii. sec. 24.

² Maldonatus proceeds to account strangely enough for this absence of the mention of punishment. "Non quidem quod ignorarint hanc satisfactionem pro poena, sed quod cum egissent tam accuratè de satisfactione pro culpa, quæ difficilior esset, *non putarint esse opus* agere de altera satisfactione." Mal. tom. 2, De Sacramentis, quoted L. iii. c. xi. sec. 14.

anyhow made satisfaction to the Divine justice ; they simply mean ‘make amends,’ and are used of such outward acts of contrition as, being opposed to the former sins, serve to express and deepen the repentance for them, and thereby turn away the Divine wrath.” . . . “It is used by the Fathers in connexion with all those habits of mind or actions which express contrition, without having in themselves anything punitive, much less any payment to the Divine justice.” The term, as Dr. Pusey shows, was used, e.g.; by Tertullian, of a “defiled dress,” as the garb of “satisfaction,” joining to it “prostrating, humbling oneself;” by S. Cyprian, as connected with “holding fast humility,” “prayer,” “tears,” “alms;” by S. Augustine, in referring to “the LORD’s Prayer,” and generally “of all acts of penitence, whether punitive or no;” by S. Ambrose, “as equivalent to verbal confession,” “tears and groans,” “turning to God;” by S. Gregory the Great as equivalent to “revenge and its effects, solely with reference to its effect on the penitent,”—expressions which, as Dr. Pusey remarks, are strictly in accordance with the original sense of the word as pointed out by Heraldus (Dig. v. ii. 4,) i.e., “making amends by acknowledging a fault, when any one besought him whom he had offended, and confessed his fault in such wise, as to signify he was exceedingly sorry for it, and wished it had not been done.” . . . In the same sense satisfaction was said to be given to the Church, when grieved and injured by the offence. In the technical language of theology, the difference between the ancient and modern (Roman) doctrine is represented by the terms, “*satisfactio pro culpâ*,” and “*satisfactio pro pœnâ*,” satisfaction for the fault, and satisfaction for the punishment due to it by the Divine justice. The former is the sense in which alone the term is known to the Fathers.

At the same time, as Dr. Pusey adds, “it is equally

plain, that self-affliction in token of displeasure at one's sins, or as a means of keeping up that displeasure, was held by the ancient Church to be acceptable to God, and to turn away His wrath; and this truth they derived from S. Paul's mention of 'revenge,' as a part of penitence. (2 Cor. vii. 11.)"¹

6. The opinion of the Fathers as to the value of Penance, and the superior value of the public in comparison with the private dealing with penitents, is so well known—their exhortations to its use are so constant and so urgent,—that it is unnecessary to multiply testimonies on these points. "That public and canonical penance is most useful, and has the greatest efficacy in obtaining from God the remission of sins, was immovably fixed in the minds of the holy Fathers. They often speak of its benefit and virtue as so essential, that they seem to imply the impossibility of the worst sins being healed without it. Unless the same opinion had possessed generally the mind of the people, men would not have sought, nay, demanded, to be admitted to penance with so great ardour." . . . Again; "Public canonical penance must have been esteemed of far greater efficacy than private, for had both been attended with equal results, who would have desired the public discipline? Who would not have preferred the light yoke of private penance to the severe bondage of the public discipline?"² Moreover, the recommendation by the Fa-

¹ Note K. p. 369, on Tertull. *passim*.

² Morinus, l. v. c. vi. This view of the patristic belief of the superior value of public penance, at least of public confession, is not held by all Roman divines. It has indeed been even questioned, whether it is not of the essence of "sacramental confession" that it should be "secret and auricular;" so great has been the tendency to disparage the public system of dealing with penitents in comparison with the later use. Estius, Suarez, Coninck, Townely, Berti, &c., argue that

thers of the confession even of secret sins, with the view of undergoing Penance, is clear and constant. Thus "Tertullian sets himself to debate the point with such as through a false modesty endeavour to conceal their crimes; and recommends penitence even for sins which as yet lurked only in the will, and had never ripened into action. S. Cyprian commends the practice, even when there was no direct offence in the fact, but only a purpose of it; he imputes it to a liveliness and vigour of faith, and an extraordinary degree of the fear of God."¹

But however great the value which the Fathers set upon Penance, they regarded it, Morinus observes, only as a most effectual aid, not as a channel of grace so necessary that forgiveness could not be had without it. "It would be untrue, and absolutely contrary to the mind of all the Fathers, to conclude that salvation could not be obtained without the exercise of penance. They held in the fullest and most absolute sense the efficacy of true internal contrition. Their strong language in urging penance only implied, that the grace of contrition was far more likely to be obtained through its use than without it, and with less probability and increased difficulty, if it were deferred till the last days of life."² Morinus speaks of it as an axiom in theology, that "true contrition cannot fail to obtain the in-

confession, whether public or private, equally avails. Billuart, on the *Summa S. Thomæ*, notes the dispute and gives the references. Vol. ix. Dissert. v. Art. 1. Billuart asserts that the public confession of secret sins was never enjoined as a command, but that the private confession of them was so enjoined both by Divine and ecclesiastical law. *Ibid.* He gives instances from the Fathers (s. 2) of exhortations to the use of private confession of secret sins, such as are adduced in the text, but no further proof of his position as to the Divine injunction of secret confession.

¹ Marshall, *Pen. Disc.* c. ii. sec. 1.

² *L. v. c. vi. xiii.*

stant forgiveness of sin."¹ "It is, and always was, certain, and even now is most frequently asserted (decantatissimum) among the schoolmen, that so great may be the contrition of a penitent even in a moment of time (tantam esse posse

¹ "Apud (Deum) nullas patitur moras vera conversio." L. ix. c. v. s. 5. Roman divines sometimes speak as though this principle could not be admitted, and that confession is as essential as contrition, or rather that no contrition is true which does not contain at least the will to confess. This will appear more fully in the next chapter in considering the Mediæval systems. Billuart (Summa S. Thomæ, vol. ix. Dissert. v. Art. iii. s. 1) thus argues the case: "Neque refert remissionem peccatorum habere posse per contritionem; quia primo ipsa confessio præcepta est a Christo, et quidem est medium necessarium ad hoc: unde non est vera contritio quæ non includit votum confessionis." Yet this can hardly be meant to be taken absolutely; for the Catechism of the Council of Trent (Question xxxiv.) says: "Contrition itself can certainly never be otherwise than grateful and acceptable to GOD, according to the words of the Prophet, *A contrite and humble heart, O God, Thou wilt not despise.* Nay, more, that no sooner do we conceive this contrition in our hearts, than our sins are forgiven us by GOD, the same prophet elsewhere declares in these words: *I said, I will confess against myself my transgressions unto the Lord, and Thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin.* Of this we observe a figure in the ten lepers, who when sent by our LORD to the priests, were cured of their leprosy before they reached them; giving us to understand, that such is the efficacy of true contrition, that by virtue thereof we obtain from the LORD the immediate pardon of all our sins." It is indeed added in question xxxvi., "Granting, that by contrition sins are blotted out, who is ignorant that (to effect this) it must be so vehement, so intense, so ardent, as that the bitterness of our sorrow may be compared with and bear a proportion to the magnitude of our crimes? But as this is a degree of contrition to which very few could reach, the consequence also was, that very few could have hoped thereby to obtain the pardon of their sins." The next question shows how confession was instituted in order to make contrition perfect—a doctrine of which more will be said in the succeeding chapter. (Buckley's translation.) It becomes therefore a question merely of degrees. True contrition is affirmed to be in itself alone sufficient to obtain the pardon of sins, but whether such contrition be possible, is doubted.

uno momento Pœnitentis contritionem) that it may avail to obtain the remission, not only of the sin, but also of all the punishment." At the same time this principle is affirmed only as a possible or abstract truth, irrespective of the ordinary working of grace in converting and healing sinners. "No one denies the possibility of the instantaneous perfect conversion of the most sinful, though all agree that such an occurrence is most rare and extraordinary, and to be regarded as a miracle, the ordinary law being, that sinners are converted and return to GOD gradually, being slowly freed from the power of sin ; and that only after long and vehement conflicts between grace and evil desire, GOD reigns in the heart, and the soul is justified ; therefore, although speaking with refined metaphysical subtlety, instantaneous justification may be said to be possible, it really requires a long period, and many precedent preparatory actions, the progress of grace varying in different persons, and being in some possibly the work of a few days, in others, of many years."¹

From what has been stated, it appears that according to ancient belief and practice, the remission of sins after baptism, at least those of the gravest kind, was ordinarily to be obtained only through Penance, preferably through public Penance, and consequently with the use of Confession, as part of Penance, true repentance being held to be always necessary as a condition of its profitable use. Holy Baptism was not supposed of itself by any prospective or implied gifts to remedy its own losses in the case of the excommunicate. Nor was the Blessed Sacrament of the Eucharist, though applying the full benefits of the Atonement, to be approached by those who had thus fallen, without a previous cleansing. Penance was held to be a distinct ordi-

¹ L. ix. c. v. sec. 2.

nance, having its own proper place and efficacy, renewing the pure baptismal position, and removing the hindrance which deadly sin causes to the vivifying and profitable reception of our LORD'S Blessed Body and Blood.

Yet at the same time the unquestionable fact, that Penance, and with it Confession, were not regarded as absolutely obligatory, even in the case of the most deadly sin ; and that secret sins, though of a deadly character, did not necessarily fall within the scope of the canonical discipline ; and further, (a fact to be afterwards considered,) the suspension of the office of Penitentiaries at Constantinople and in the East, in the 5th century,—sufficiently prove that the remission of sin might, in the judgment of the Fathers, be obtained without the use of such means, through the abounding grace of GOD. The availing power of true contrition alone, through the merits of CHRIST, was ever believed to be such that, even in the case of sins for which the law of the Church properly required Penance, grace was supposed to overflow its ordinary channels in response to its appeal, through direct and secret intercourse of the soul with GOD, though the safer course, and that which reverent and careful minds would ever follow, was universally held to be only through the ministry of the Priest.

No difficulty was felt by the Fathers as to the coexistence of these apparently conflicting principles. They felt that the two principles were intended to act and react mutually on each other, perfect trust being reposed on each revelation of the will of GOD, and truth believed to result from the balance of their separate forces. The ground on which this view rests, is not confined to the question immediately before us. It extends through various dispensations of GOD towards His creatures. The idea is that two or more modes of Divine operation, or truths, are revealed, apparently inconsistent, but equally binding on us, depending, it may be,

for their mutual harmonious action on a common relation to some higher law, not as yet discerned by us, and intended by their mutual counteraction to modify each other. "In almost all cases in which a mysterious truth is propounded by Almighty GOD for our acceptance, it is in reality to a twofold or compound, and not to a single or simple article of belief, that our assent is required. The peculiar task which our faculty of belief is set in such cases, is no other than this,—to hold in conjunction, simply and without reserve, some *two* divinely affirmed matters or positions, either of which we should probably make no difficulty of accepting by itself, but whose *compatibility* or *possible co-existence*, we are unable to perceive."¹ Mr. Freeman applies the principle to the co-existence of the natural and supernatural substances in the Holy Eucharist, and adduces as similar cases the union of the two natures in the One Person of CHRIST, the co-existence of GOD's foreknowledge and our free-will, and again that of Divine inspiration and human composition in the Scriptures.

This same law was believed by the Fathers to obtain in respect of the benefit of absolution, and the inherent acceptableness of contrition. It was no uncertainty of belief in the promises attached to the priestly ministry, no lack of definiteness of view, which occasioned the variations in the statements of the Fathers, sometimes representing the grace of remission, as shed forth within the soul directly through GOD's own secret workings, sometimes as flowing only through the ordained ministry. Rather it arose from a profound consciousness of the living energy and love of the HOLY SPIRIT, and the closeness of communion between the elect soul and the Divine indwelling Presence. They affirmed without question, and in the strongest terms, the

¹ Freeman's "Principles of Divine Service." Introduction, Part II., pp. 14, 15.

grace of sacerdotal absolution, while yet they scrupled not to ascribe an absolute value, irrespective of all outward means of grace, to the living force of true contrition, at the same time not supposing that the acceptableness of contrition superseded the use or value of a subsequent absolution. They affirmed both principles, and left them to be held equally and in common.

Morinus thus sums up the views of the Fathers on this subject, which prevailed, as he affirms, for eleven centuries, reconciling their apparent differences, which are in fact only statements of two co-existent and harmonious truths. "The proper effect of priestly absolution is the renewed assistance of the HOLY SPIRIT, by which the soul is justified, the guilt of sin removed, its bonds broken, and the true and actual remission of sins bestowed, CHRIST through the virtue of His Spirit co-operating with the act of His minister, approving and confirming in Heaven, what he on earth according to the Church's law has granted ;" "but if through the fervour of repentance, (*ob pietatis vehementiam*,) the Divine has anticipated the sacerdotal absolution, then the sacerdotal sets a further seal on the Divine absolution, and is the means of imparting a larger grace of the HOLY SPIRIT, with increased joy and more abundant fruits."¹ Thus GOD was believed to accompany or precede the ministerial act, working either through or independently of it, according to the secret purpose of His own will, while at the same time a sure promise and spiritual grace was ever believed to attach to the ordained ministry, and a true relation still to exist between the inward and the outward act.

Hooker also expresses the primitive belief as to the concordant action of the two principles, allowing to each its own separate claim, as alike operative within its own sphere, yet each in harmony with the other in the fulfilment of the

¹ L. viii. cap. ii. sec. 1, 2.

merciful designs of GOD. "It is true that our SAVIOUR by these words, 'Whose sins ye remit they are remitted,' did ordain judges over sinful souls, give them authority to absolve from sin, and promise to ratify in heaven whatsoever they do in earth in execution of this their office ; to the end that hereby as well His ministers might take encouragement to do their duty with all faithfulness, as also His people admonition gladly with all reverence to be ordered by them ; both parts knowing that the functions of the one towards the other have His perpetual assistance and approbation. Howbeit, all this with two restraints which every jurisdiction in the world hath ; the one, that the practice thereof proceed in due order, the other, that it do not extend itself beyond due bounds, which bounds or limits have so confined penitential jurisdiction, that although there be given unto it power of remitting sin, yet no such sovereignty of power, that no sin should be pardonable in man without it."¹

¹ Eccl. Pol. 1. vi. cap. vi. 3.

CHAPTER III.

THE MEDIÆVAL PERIOD.

THE ancient Discipline declined when the Roman empire became Christian. That momentous crisis in the fortunes of the Church tended powerfully to occasion the decline. There was less urgent need to enforce Discipline, when the power of paganism was overcome, and the danger of apostasy had ceased. The difficulty of maintaining it was also greatly aggravated by the sudden and great increase of converts, many of a doubtful character, and many also of the more powerful and wealthier classes. The spread of heresy was acting in the same direction, through breaking down the barriers of spiritual authority. Moreover, the mutual action of the ecclesiastical and civil courts furthered this tendency, all the more when they became friendly, from fear of subjecting the penitent to civil penalties, which would follow the crime, if divulged.

S. Augustine, even though, as previous references to his writings show, feeling most strongly the value and necessity of the public Penance, yet alludes specially to this last hindrance, and expresses his sense of its influence in deterring the clergy from recommending it, when the case nevertheless clearly fell within its intended scope. "We ought," he says, "to correct secret sins in secret, lest if we publicly reprove them, we betray the man. We would reprove and correct him; but what if an enemy lies upon the catch, to

hear something for which he may punish him? A Bishop, put the case, perhaps knows a man to be a murderer, and besides himself no one knows it; I would publicly rebuke the man, but then you would seek to take the law upon him. In this case, I neither betray the man nor neglect him; I reprove him in secret; I set before his face the judgment of GOD; I terrify his bloody conscience, and persuade him to repentance.”¹

Independently of such special causes, the natural shrinking from the public exposure of secret sins, the desire to obviate the sufferings which a disclosure would occasion the relatives of the penitent, and the dread of the scandals likely to arise, casting reproach even upon the Church itself,—would be certain in the course of time to operate with the same result. Even so early as the commencement of the third century, Tertullian complained of the neglect of Penance.² In the middle of the fourth century Pacian lamented the case of those who when “they had opened their grievances to their spiritual physician, yet neglected afterwards to pursue his advice, and to go through the course prescribed for them.”³ At a somewhat later period S. Jerome expressed his astonishment at a “lady of rank submitting to public penance,”⁴ as though it were then an unusual act of humiliation. Marshall states as the result of his researches, that “the clergy did with much ado sustain and keep alive this discipline during the four first centuries.”⁵ Hooker is more precise in his statement: “The public penance continued in the East not

¹ Serm. xvi. quoted by Bingham, l. xviii. ch. iii. sect. 9.

² See Marshall, Pen. Disc., p. 101.

³ Pacian in Parænes. ad Pœnit. sec. 9, quoted by Marshall, Penit. Disc. b. of Anglo-Cath. Theol., p. 102.

⁴ S. Jerome, Pen. Disc., p. 103.

Marshall, Pen. Disc., p. 102.

⁵ Marshall, p. 102.

much above two hundred years, in the West almost four hundred."¹

The first step towards systematising private Confession was the appointment of Penitentiaries, an institution which arose in, and was limited to, the East. They were select confessors, to whom the guidance of penitents was specially entrusted, and under whose direction they performed in secret the penance imposed upon them.² Hooker quotes Sozomen's explanation of the institution: "Whereas men openly craving pardon at GOD's hands, it could not be avoided, but they must withal confess what their offences were; this, in the opinion of their prelates, seemed from the first beginning (as we may probably think) to be somewhat burdensome, that men whose crimes were unknown should blare their own faults, as it were upon a stage, acquainting all the people with whatsoever they had done amiss; and therefore to remedy this inconvenience, they laid the charge upon one only Priest, chosen out of such as were of best conversation, a silent and discreet man, to whom they which had offended might resort and lay open their lives. He, according to the quality of every man's transgression, appointed what they should do or suffer, and left them to execute it upon themselves."³

In the West, a letter of S. Leo to the Bishops of Campania, A.D. 441, marks a similar tendency to organize private Confession separately from the public Discipline. The special object of the letter was simply to prevent the continuance of an innovation which was causing scandal to the Church, and needless distress to penitents; but at the same time it asserted principles which could hardly fail to develope into a systematic use of private, in the place of

¹ Eccl. Pol. l. vi. ch. iv. sec. 13.

² See Bingham. Eccl. Ant. l. xviii. ch. iii. sec. 11, 12.

³ Eccl. Pol. l. vi. c. iv. 11.

public, Penance. "They were," he said, "to discontinue the usage which then obtained, of publishing out of a paper the nature of such crimes as had been privately confessed, and that because private confession to the priest was sufficient to the expiation of guilt (*cum reatus conscientiarum sufficiat solis sacerdotibus indicari confessione secretâ.*) And although it might seem to argue the power of their faith, when their fear of God surmounted all apprehension of shame from man, yet in regard that the sins of all men which, however, did demand expiation by penance, were not of a nature fit to be published, therefore he judged it proper to remove such an inconvenient custom, for fear of driving many from the advantages of penance, who might either be afraid or ashamed of letting their enemies into the knowledge of their guilt, and of exposing themselves thereby to the edge of the laws, inasmuch as that confession did suffice, to all intents and purposes, which was made at first to God, and next to the priest, who is appointed to intercede with God on behalf of penitents; and that then, in all likelihood, greater numbers would be prevailed with to submit to penance, if the secrets of their consciences should not be made public."¹

The highest authorities came gradually to recommend this more private ministry, as a permission rendered advisable by the altered circumstances of the times. Marshall quotes as an instance, the advice given by S. Augustine; "It is allowed that in the time of Augustine the public discipline was declining, and had much ado to maintain itself; and therefore this same Father, in his Epistle to Amelius, recommended the softer way of treating sins, which had multitudes to countenance them."² Morinus

¹ *Les. Epis. No. 136, ad Episc. Camp., as quoted by Marshall, p. 104.*

Marshall, p. 116.

concludes, that about A.D. 700, public and private Penance had become distinct and separate systems, the former being reserved for public and notorious, the latter for secret, sins.

The mode of reconciling penitents in the private ministry, was formed upon the model of the public Discipline, an incidental proof of its derived character and later use.¹ The administration of the public Penance, as coming more within the scope of the canon law, was left, as at the beginning, in the hands of the Bishop, that of private Penance was committed to Priests.²

Dr. Pusey agrees with Morinus as to the period when the distinction became fixed between public and private Penance. He adds the date at which the public ministry altogether ceased to be practised, and the private alone remained in use, a change strikingly marked, as he observes, in the altered language of the Church. In an elaborate argument proving that the modern practice of private Penance was unknown to the ancients, he says; "Another and unquestionable ground of proof has been furnished by the different use of the word, 'penitents,' at different periods. In the early Church, it signified in itself public penitents (as above, Conc. Carth. p. 390, S. Augustine, p. 398; Conc. Tolet., A. 400, canon 2;) from the 8th to the 13th century the nature of the penitence is distinguished by the addition, 'public' or 'private;' then, 'public' penitence being

¹ This is not admitted by the school of Roman divines represented e.g. by Billuart, who asserts the direct contrary. "Constat e dictis publicam, tum pœnitentiam, cum confessionem a secretâ derivari, et hanc fuisse publicæ normam et regulam." But the proofs to which he refers for this assertion, are simply such passages as have been quoted from the Fathers in the text as to the difficulty or inconvenience of continuing the public system. Summa S. Thomæ, l. i. Dissert. v. Art. 1, digressio historica.

² Morinus, l. vii. c. i. sec. 1, 8.

wholly disused, the terms again ceased to be distinguished by any addition, and, as in the first period, when used alone, it signified 'public,' so now it implied, 'private penitence,' or 'penitent.'"¹

The progressive changes in the penitential Discipline of the Church thus seem to be clear. At first it was administered, as Confession was made, in public. Even sins only privately confessed, were remitted after Penance performed in public. Afterwards secret sins were followed by secret penance; only notorious guilt, being the subject-matter of canonical jurisdiction, and special cases of voluntary self-abasement, were still atoned by public Penance. Lastly, even these latter cases came to be dealt with more and more in private, the public exposure of penitents being less and less frequent, and reserved for extraordinary instances of flagrant transgression.

Thus far the changes which had taken place, were the unavoidable result of altered social circumstances. The first material innovation on the practice of antiquity, purposely introduced, and the one fraught with the most eventful and enduring consequences, was the decree of the Fourth Lateran Council, A.D. 1215, under Innocent III., which established the absolute necessity of periodical Confession, as a condition of continued fellowship with the Church. It declared, that "all the faithful, men and women, should confess their sins at least once a year to their pastors." This decree was enforced by severe penalties,—excommunication, and the denial of Christian burial; and these penalties were renewed by repeated enactments in the succeeding century, as though resistance had arisen, and required to be met by stringent measures. In 1378, it was enjoined in England: "Let Confessions be heard thrice in the year, and let men be admonished to communicate as

¹ Notes. M. de Poenit. Tertullian.

often, namely, at Easter, Pentecost, and Christmas. But whoever does not confess to his proper Priest once in the year at least, and receive the Sacrament of the Eucharist at Easter (unless he think he ought to abstain by the advice of the Priest,) let him be forbidden entrance into the Church while he is alive, and be deprived of Christian burial when dead. And let them be often told of this."¹

The object of this decree of compulsory Confession was no doubt to uphold the failing discipline of the Church, at a period of general and increasing laxity of morals. As public Penance had gradually fallen into disuse, so there was probably a growing tendency to escape the pressure of the private ministry, and the rulers of the Church sought to maintain by moral force what was universally allowed to be necessary in its season, and in better times had been sought, when needed, with comparative readiness, or even with forward zeal. This compulsory law, when first established, was only a matter of discipline; but by degrees it became associated with doctrines, which about the same period began to be taught, and which were supposed to prove this necessity as part of the Divine law. Thus it arose, that what was at first merely a canonical enactment, became a dogma of the faith, so-that to question it was made thenceforth throughout the West a heresy. By this new rule Confession became obligatory, not merely when the conscience was burdened, and in the case of the more grievous sins, or as an available means of grace in the case of lesser sins, but as a necessary habit, to be practised at least once in every year, and thus a law of life, even for the most blameless.

There is a remarkable similarity between the changes which took place in the ministry of Penance, and the more

¹ Archbishop Sudbury's Constitutions, made at Lambeth, A.D. 1378. Johnson's English Canons.

eventful developments affecting the Holy Eucharist. In both cases alike the transition was gradual, and at first almost imperceptible. In both, change of practice preceded change of doctrine, and mainly occasioned it.¹ It might seem as though the desire of upholding the novel practice by an absolute rule, quickened the invention, and then promoted the elaboration of doctrine, in order to form a more authoritative basis, on which the new use could be maintained as a truth of the revelation of GOD. As the withdrawal of the consecrated Cup had partially at least commenced, before the doctrine of concomitance was introduced, and then, sustained by this doctrine, its entire withdrawal from the laity followed,² so Confession to a Priest was made necessary as a rule of discipline, before it was taught to be essential as a matter of faith and Divine revelation.

2. It is not meant that one uniform teaching prevailed in the schools. Morinus says: "As soon as the scholastic theology arose, this subject (of Penance) was most keenly debated." He represents the theologians of the middle ages as being led into various and contrary opinions; and "even yet," he adds, "the contest is not at an end."³ He enumerates nine different schemes of doctrine, which during the middle ages prevailed in turn, each in succession superseding its predecessor. There was indeed a constant agreement in the schools as to the necessity of Confession, or at

¹ See Freeman's Introduction, 2nd vol. pp. 50—53.

² Freeman's Introduction, 2nd vol. p. 79. See also note to p. 79. It is not intended to express any opinion in the text on the question of receiving CHRIST under one kind, but only to note the fact of the doctrinal view succeeding the use as counteracting the fear of any loss being incurred by the new practice. It was at least a novel exposition of doctrine.

³ Lib. viii. cap. xi. Morinus composed his treatise about the middle of the sixteenth century.

least of the purpose to confess; but the ground on which this necessity was supposed to rest, continually shifted. Thus some of the earlier schoolmen taught, that "contrition, confession, and satisfaction by works, must precede absolution, and on absolution being given, God forgave the sins;" others, that "absolution was only conditional, the Priest absolving dependently on the imposed penance being afterwards completed, and that then, not at the time of absolution, the forgiveness of the sin followed." Others, again, "distinguished between internal, and external, confession and satisfaction, and taught that sins were remitted on contrition accompanied with the purpose of external confession and satisfaction, and therefore before the reception of priestly absolution, but that afterwards it was necessary to confess in order to have penance imposed, on the fulfilment of which the penitent was admitted to communion, absolution according to this idea being held to be simply declaratory." Another "opinion which was most approved by the earliest Canonists, distinguished between open and secret sins, and ruled that the former were remitted only after public and canonical penance and absolution, the latter before outward confession and satisfaction, solely on contrition and inward confession and satisfaction before God."

But the theory which was finally adopted by the most celebrated theologians of the middle ages, supposed a three-fold bond or debt to arise from sin—the inward stain or fault, the temporal, and the eternal, punishment. They held that the first was removed by God alone on contrition: the third by God conditionally on confession and absolution: and that the second, the temporal punishment, remained to be worked out by the penitent, either in this or the next world, though capable also of being remitted conditionally on the imposed penance being fulfilled. Yet another

opinion had its day, according to which it was supposed, that on contrition God of Himself alone remitted the fault, and changed the eternal into a temporal punishment, which itself, being greater than the penitent could bear, might be commuted through confession and priestly absolution into one more tolerable; and this again, through satisfaction imposed by the Priest, be altogether removed. Amidst all the varieties which mark these several theories, they still agree in the one point of the absolute necessity either of Confession, or the purpose to confess.

3. Fresh complications of the theory of Penance arose out of the abstruse questions discussed in the schools concerning the infusion of grace. It was conceived, that grace is infused into the soul, as "a Divine spiritual quality," distinct from virtue or any specific power of goodness in operation, such power or virtue being an effect of it, flowing out from it; and that this new quality, thus secretly become part of the soul, and latent within it, renders it well-pleasing to God, and forms its first justification.¹ When this opinion was applied to the doctrine of Penance, it was held, —Morinus shows that all the latter theories of the school-

¹ This first infusion was known in scholastic language as *gratia gratum faciens*, or *gratia habitualis*, because forming, as was supposed, an abiding possession or habit. Mr. Keble in his note to Hooker's Sermon. ii. 5, vol. iii. pt. 3, p. 605, quotes S. T. Aquinas' definition of the doctrine. (Thom. Aquin. Summa Theol. II, par. I, quæst. 100.) "*Gratia gratum faciens, i.e., justificans, est in animâ quiddam reale et positivum; qualitas quædam supernaturalis, non eadem cum virtute infusa, ut magister, sed aliquid præter infusas virtutes, fidem, spem, charitatem, habitudo quædam quæ præsupponitur in virtutibus istis, sicut earum principium et radix; essentiam animæ tanquam subjectum occupat, non potentiâ, sed ab ipsâ.*" The term "habitual" was used in this connection, not in its present ordinary sense of a "fixed growth resulting from long use," but, as its etymology simply implies, "of an actual possession."

men involved the belief—that habitual grace, as this infused quality was technically called, was imparted in the very act of Confession, the precise moment of its bestowal being undetermined, whether during the act of Confession, or on the prayer of the Priest preceding absolution.

A most eventful change in the whole view of Penance resulted from the introduction of this new element. Hence sprang the idea, that through this secretly infused grace given in recompense for the outward act, inward dispositions might be formed capable of supplying any defect which otherwise would render the act invalid. Thus, so it was argued, attrition, or repentance grounded on a servile fear of punishment, might through the very act of Confession be transformed into contrition, or repentance grounded on love, and a true, keen sense of sin. It was on this principle taught, that an imperfect repentance accompanied with Confession, through reception of this secret quality bestowed in Confession, might become perfect, the mere act itself entitling the penitent to the further grace. It followed that an imperfect faith and a merely servile fear were a sufficient preparation for a true Confession, because what was wanting to perfect fitness for entire reconciliation with GOD was supplied in the act. This opinion finally prevailed, and fixed its firm hold on the theology of the Latin Church, being at length confirmed by the Council of Trent.¹

That penitence may, and often does, deepen in the act of Confession, grace working at the time increased or tenderer convictions of sin, and opening the soul to new or larger impressions of the love of GOD,—is a matter of experience which may have conduced to the introduction of this theory, or given to it an apparent confirmation. The attitude of the soul confessing its sins especially under the guidance of

¹ The present general belief among Roman theologians, as stated by Perrone, is that attrition becomes contrition through confession.

one experienced in receiving confessions, is no doubt favourable to the reception of such deepened feelings of repentance. Confession may thus become the occasion of obtaining further grace. But it is not necessarily so. The injury done to primitive belief was in systematising an occasional and incidental consequence, making such possible superadded convictions or impressions part of the necessary sacramental benefit, a sure covenanted consequence of the outward act; and then constituting this theory to be the basis of further consequences, bearing intimately on the whole practical life.

Perrone observes, that it became all but a matter of faith (*ad fidem proxime accedit*;) at least after the Council of Trent, that "true contrition with love is not necessary for the right reception of the sacrament of penance."¹ He at the same time scruples not to acknowledge the novelty of the opinion, while accounting for the motives which led the Council to sanction it. "We are fully aware," he says, "it was everywhere firmly held by the schoolmen before the Council of Trent, at least up to the time of S. Thomas Aquinas, that true contrition is necessary to the right reception of the sacrament of penance. But in the Council of Trent that opinion was seriously questioned, because of its close resemblance to the errors of the Protestants, namely, that sins were not really remitted by the words of priestly absolution, but only declared to be remitted. Yet the Tri-

¹ The Jansenists were condemned for holding the opposite opinion. The subsequent history of the discussion is remarkable. Two parties continued to exist after the Council of Trent, one called the "attritionistæ," the other the "contritionistæ." Alexander VII., in a decree dated 5 Mar., 1667, forbade under pain of excommunication either party to censure the other, adding—"The opinion which denies the necessity of any love of God in attrition, appears at the present day to be the more commonly held in the schools." Perrone, *Tract. de Pœnit. cap. ii. contrit. sec. 38, note (1)*.

dentine fathers did not censure that opinion, lest they should fix blame on the ancients. Nevertheless, if we except the Jansenists, who made that obsolete opinion their own, and a very few theologians besides, all (Roman) Catholics have renounced it.”¹

Morinus observes, that this theory concerning attrition reached its climax among the later schoolmen, when it was taught by very many, and those of great weight and celebrity (*viri graves et celebres permulti*), that it is “possible for a penitent to be reconciled to God even after the commission of manifold sins, without an act of contrition and love to God, if only the sacrament of penance be received :” nay, even—a statement painful to record, though it legitimately follows from the foregoing premises,—that “the superiority and special prerogative of the evangelical sacraments in comparison with those of the old law, consists in this,

¹ Tract. de Pœn., cap. ii. sec. 60. By the term Protestant, in this and similar statements, the foreign Protestants who rejected all sacramental views, are intended. It is to be carefully noted that the anathemas of the Council of Trent, like Moehler’s Symbolism, are aimed at a directly unsacramental theory, and do not properly apply to a system such as our formularies represent. The Canon of the Council of Trent, “De contritione” (Sess. xiv. cap. iv.), decrees (1) that contrition without the sacrament of Penance, or the desire of it, does not suffice for the forgiveness of sin—“Docet, etsi contritionem hanc aliquando charitate perfectam esse contingat, hominemque Deo reconciliare, priusquam hoc sacramentum actu suscipiatur, ipsam nihilominus reconciliationem ipsi contritioni, sine sacramenti voto, quod in illâ includitur, non esse adscribendam ;” and (2) that attrition, together with the sacrament, or the desire of it, suffices for justification : “Quamvis sine sacramento pœnitentiæ (contritio imperfecta, quæ attritio dicitur,) per se ad justificationem perducere peccatorem nequeat, tamen eum ad Dei gratiam in sacramento pœnitentiæ impetrandam disponit.”

Perrone interprets another decree of the same Council (Sess. vi. c. vi.), as determining that “the wicked are prepared for justification *even through the act*, by which they begin to love God as the Fountain of all righteousness.”

that the former release us from the heavy yoke of the exercise of contrition and the love of God (*gravissimo contritionis et dilectionis Dei jugo nos liberarent*), CHRIST having taught the necessity of confession, in order that the sinner should no more be weighed down by the too great burden, substituting instead of the necessity of Divine love the habit or quality of loving (i.e., the infused latent grace spoken of above,) which is bestowed in the sacrament."¹

The maze of intricate and perplexed subtleties involved in these and similar theories, apparently arose out of the felt difficulty of reconciling two conflicting and incongruous propositions, namely, the later view of the absolute necessity and meritoriousness of confession, and the earlier belief, which yet was not, and could not be denied, that true contrition is itself a sufficient condition for the reconciliation of a penitent soul with God.

4. A yet further change in the doctrine of Confession, and one, like the former, of a most eventful character, resulted from the new opinions concerning satisfaction, which grew up during the same period. The need of satisfaction viewed as a corrective discipline, was shown in the last chapter to have been held from the beginning; but this, the primitive, view of the subject was gradually superseded by what may be called the punitive theory. Penances

¹ Lib. viii. c. iv. sec. 2, 26. Even the Council of Trent, contrasting the case of the unbaptized with that of the baptized, implies that less is required of the latter than of the former, the access to the sacrament of penance making a lower degree of repentance sufficient for acceptance. The decree, which begins by saying that contrition was at all times before baptism necessary to obtain pardon of sins, at its close rules that attrition, though without the sacrament of Penance it cannot bring a sinner to justification, yet disposes him to obtain it in the sacrament. See the preceding note where the passage is quoted. Sess. xiv. cap. iv. The proposition seems only a less startling statement of the view detailed in the text.

originally imposed for the purpose of satisfying the requirements of Church discipline, and for deepening repentance in the soul, came to be regarded as a means of satisfying the demands of Divine Justice. The opinion grew, that besides the eternal punishment due for sin, which is wholly remitted through the merits of CHRIST, there yet, at least generally, remained temporal penalties to be borne by the absolved penitent. As the doctrine of the meritoriousness of human actions gained acceptance, this also fell in with the new theory. It was believed, that penitential acts imposed by the Priest might by their merit compensate for penalties due to GOD. Moreover, the custom which had grown of allowing penances to be performed after absolution in trust on the penitent's faithfulness in fulfilling them, and because they were held to be a discipline of the after life, as well as a preparation for forgiveness of sin,—this custom, especially when viewed in connection with the new doctrines, seemed to favour the idea that such acts had relation to the consequences following sin, though pardoned.

As these concurring views gradually acquired consistency, they were shaped into laws, which ruled the practice of the Church, till at length they were permanently fixed by the decrees of the Council of Trent.

Perrone thus explains the modern and authorised theory of Satisfaction. "Satisfaction is the compensation of the injury done to GOD by our sins. In all at least grievous sin a twofold property (*proprietas*) is found to exist, viz., the guilt (*reatus*) of the fault and its eternal punishment, which are removed as soon as the sinner returns to the grace and favour of GOD, and, secondly, the guilt of temporal punishment, which for the most part (*plerumque*) remains after the forgiveness of the sin; and, in order to

expiate this latter consequence, the penitent is bound to pay to GOD alms, prayers, and fasts, as the Council of Trent teaches (Sess. vi. cap. 14,) and other pious works, or punishments patiently endured; either voluntarily undertaken or enjoined by the priest, so that according to his ability he may compensate for the injury done to GOD by his sins, and satisfy His justice.”¹

It is not to be understood as though this new theory implied human satisfaction to be in itself available before GOD for the remission of punishment. Perrone, referring to the decrees of Trent (Sess. xiv. c. viii,) guards against this supposition, and explains that “our satisfactions derive all their force or virtue (*totam vim*) from CHRIST’s merits, and that His satisfaction and our own are thus reconciled together.” But notwithstanding this disclaimer, the idea of the efficacy of human acts of penance for the remission of Divine punishment, though derived and dependent, still remained, and became so prominent a characteristic of the modern Roman theory of Confession, that it was accounted by the Tridentine Divines to be the one reason for its absolute necessity, Priests being declared to be judges especially in this sense, that they are GOD’s commissioned agents to determine and impose the exact amount of satisfaction due to Him, in order to expiate the amount of sin committed against Him, and for this reason requiring to know the sins committed with all their circumstances, inasmuch as without such knowledge they could not estimate the due amount of satisfaction. Perrone thus explains the belief as affirmed at Trent:—“It is evident from these words (‘Whosoever sins ye remit,’ &c., ‘Whosoever sins ye retain,’ &c.) that Priests ordained by CHRIST are judges, invested with the power of binding and loosing, remitting and retaining, sins; but, as the Council of Trent says (Sess.

¹ Tract. Pœn., cap. iv. sec. 183.

xiv. cap. v.,) it is certain that Priests cannot exercise such a judgment without knowing the causes, nor *preserve equity in apportioning punishments*, unless men declare to them their sins, not only generally, but also specifically and in detail." On this ground, assuming a true analogy to exist between the sacrament of penance and human courts of justice, the conclusion followed, as a legitimate consequence ; "When therefore CHRIST erected the tribunal of penance after the likeness of a civil court of justice, it must necessarily be acknowledged, from the authority of Scripture, that unless there be confession of every deadly sin, with the circumstances determining its species or kind, sins cannot be remitted or retained."¹

5. To complete our view of the changes of opinion which so greatly affected the whole penitential system of the

¹ Perrone, Tract. c. iii. sec. 106. The words of the Council of Trent are ; " Dominus noster, Jesus Christus, e terris ascensus ad cœlos, sacerdotes sui ipsius vicarios reliquit tamquam præsides et iudices, ad quos omnia mortalia crimina deferantur in quæ Christi fideles ceciderint, quo pro potestate clavium remissionis aut retentionis peccatorum sententiam pronuntient. Constat enim, sacerdotes iudicium hoc incognitâ causâ exercere non potuisse, neque æquitatem quidem illos in pœnis injungendis servare potuisse, si in genere duntaxat, et non potius in specie ac sigillatim, sua ipsi peccata declarassent." Sess. xiv. cap. v. de Confess. The system of dealing with penitents according to this theory is evidently founded on the analogy of human courts of justice, rather than on the idea of a ministry of grace. Hence, as a criminal is wholly committed to the judge, his cause wholly depending on his sentence, so the forgiveness of the penitent came to be considered as wholly dependent on the sentence of the Priest, and his judgment of the punishment due for the offence.

The hope of Divine forgiveness is thus entirely dependent on confession. Hooker quotes Bellarmine, asserting, "that there is not any promise of forgiveness upon confession made to GOD without the priest." His words when commenting on 1 S. John i. 9, are "Verba

Western Church, we must moreover trace, however succinctly, the progress of ideas which led to the establishment of Indulgences. It is not difficult to account for the growth of this practice. A canon was passed at the Council of Nice (Can. 12,) giving to Bishops a discretionary power of relaxing, or altogether dispensing, penances imposed according to the Church's law. The canon is thus paraphrased by Marshall :—"It entrusted the Bishops with a discretionary power of relaxing the penitent's sentence, and of shortening the time he should continue under it, as they should observe his behaviour to be more or less deserving. If he contented himself with the common forms of coming into the church, and of leaving it with other penitents; if he did not manifest a compunction of heart, as well as submit to the outward appearances and gestures of penitential sorrow; he was then to have no abatements, but was to go completely through the stages and the time assigned him. Whereas, if either his former conversation had been exemplary before his lapse, or if his conduct after it did sufficiently prove the realities of his inward grief, in

illa, 'Fidelis est et justus,' &c., referuntur ad promissionem divinam; ideo enim Deus fidelis et justus dicitur, dum peccata confitentibus remittet, quia stat promissis suis, nec fidem fallit." And then follows the momentous statement; "At promissio de remittendis peccatis iis, qui confitentur Deo peccata sua, non videtur ulla exstare in divinis literis; exstat autem promissio apertissima iis qui ad illos accedunt, quibus dictum est Johannis xx. 21, Quorum remiseritis peccata, remittuntur eis." In loc.

One cause of the difference between the Roman and English judgment on this point, is to be found in the difference between the Roman and the English mind in respect to objectiveness. The tendency of the Roman mind is to the objective, that of the English to the subjective, aspect of a truth. An excess in dwelling on the outward form, would therefore naturally characterise the one; an excess in regard to the inward action of the soul, the other.

such cases his Bishop might contract the time allotted for his continuance under the penitential discipline, and might restore him to communion before its expiration."¹

The various theories of penance which have passed under our view, necessarily affected the character of a dispensation. When regarded in this connexion, a dispensation became virtually a release from the pains and penalties due to the Divine justice; and as these penalties were believed to extend beyond the grave, a dispensation would embrace the sufferings of another world. Moreover, from the supposed meritoriousness of human actions, it followed, as a possible inference, that some more distinguished Saints, doing more than was of necessity required, could merit more than was needed for themselves; and these superabundant acts, added to our LORD'S merits, might form a store or treasure to be applied by the Church, as part of the ministry of reconciliation. Further, the idea obtained, as a supposed consequence of the doctrine of the "Communion of Saints," that by virtue of the mystical fellowship uniting together the members of the One Body, the merits of one person might be transferred to another—those who possessed an excess supplementing others who were deficient.²

¹ Marshall, Pen. Disc., p. 127.

² Dr. Ullmann, in his "Reformers before the Reformation," thus traces the growth of the theory of Indulgences, (Vol. I., p. 238, 240.) "As in early times, the penances of the excommunicated were frequently mitigated, so in the course of the Middle Ages, an analogous mitigation was introduced with reference to the works of penance, to which delinquents were subjected. Permission was given to exchange a more severe for a gentler kind of penance. Sometimes in the place of doing penance himself, the party was allowed to employ a substitute, and sometimes *in fine*, instead of the actual penance prescribed, some service conducive to the interests of the Church and the glory of GOD, was accepted. This last was the real basis of indulgence. Even here, however, the process

A change had gradually passed over the popular idea of sanctity. Instead of being viewed as a form of character having a unity of life, it came to be regarded as an accumulation of acts, the sum of an appreciable series, the items of which could be computed and valued. Even our LORD's acts of obedience, and His sufferings, were thus regarded as divisible into individual details, each having its own separate value. As but one drop of His Precious Blood was believed to suffice for the redemption of the world, there would remain an indefinite treasure over and above what was necessarily required for our salvation, to be applied as the ground of additional dispensations from the temporal consequences of sin. According to the same principle every sin was supposed to have its fixed measure of temporal punishment, which could be remitted only by

was gradual. At first only personal acts for the Church were admitted. Then pecuniary gifts became more and more common, until at last the matter assumed the shape of a mere money speculation. The administration grew up in practice. Then came Scholasticism, and furnished it with a theoretical substratum; and not until the institution had thus received an ecclesiastical and scientific basis, was a method of practice introduced which overstepped all limits." "Indulgence has that precise amount of efficacy which the Church assigns to it. In order to this six conditions are required, two on the part of him who dispenses it, viz., competent authority and a pious cause, two on the part of the receiver, viz., repentance and faith in the power of the keys, and two on the part of the Church, viz., the superabundance of the treasure of merits, and a proper appreciation of the deliverance for which indulgence was instituted.

"The whole exposition, both of Alexander of Hales, and of Albert the Great, proceeds on the radical though unexpressed supposition, that the Church is properly an indivisible whole, the parts of which are all connected with each other, as a mystical body, in which the acts of the head redound to the advantage of the members, and those of any one member to that of all the others: so that in consequence of their mutual connexion as members one of another, the merits of each are transferable to any of the rest."

some adequate penance. This might be borne either by the sinner, or by another on his behalf. Out of the stock of superabundant merits there could be drawn at will an endless amount of dispensations, which, originally, standing in the stead of the canonical penances, availed equally, as was supposed, for the remission of the temporal penalties judged to be due. Morinus¹ quotes, among others, Alexander Hales, Albertus Magnus, and his greater pupil, S. Thomas Aquinas, as expositors of this theory of works of supererogation, and their application to Indulgences, and then adds :—"Following these chiefs of the scholastic theology, all the later schoolmen not only took for granted this treasure of the Church, but also taught that it was the ground on which Indulgences were granted."²

Morinus distinguishes three successive developments of this doctrine, before it reached the climax of abuse, which led directly to the outbreak of the first Reformation movement in Germany. Its first application, as he describes it, was the redemption of penances by money payments, to be disposed of for charitable uses. Days or years of penance might be redeemed by alms according to a fixed and authorized scale, graduated to meet the pecuniary circumstances of the penitent.³ It was, as has been observed, the principle of the *were-guild* applied to the laws of the spiritual life. There was, no doubt, a seeming harmlessness and plausibility in such a permission, for it might readily be regarded as a mere modification of the self-sacrifice which constitutes

¹ Morinus, l. x. cap. xx. sec. 3.

² L. x. c. xxi. sec. 15 and passim.

³ Some have thought that this practice of money payment was introduced by our Archbishop Theodore. Others, and among the rest Morinus and Marshall, with greater probability suppose that he only reduced an existing practice to rule. His Penitential contains minute details of the practical working of the system.

the essence of acts of penance. But when such a rule of barter could be formally and authoritatively established, it is evident, that penance had ceased to be regarded as a discipline of the inner life, and had practically become a matter of external value. The principle of redemption thus far admitted, was capable of an indefinite extension. For if money were an adequate substitute for penance, why not also any act of charity or holy zeal? Morinus notes, as the second stage of development, the use of Indulgences in mustering armies to wage war against the heathen, against heretics or schismatics, and more especially for the defence of the Holy Land. On a gigantic scale Indulgences were granted to those who perilled their lives in the battles of the Church, and absolutions were lavishly bestowed in anticipation of the warrior's possible death. The Crusades were mainly sustained by the power of this supernatural stimulus.¹ Morinus says; "Because the labour was immense, and full of hazard, and the benefit arising from it singularly great, affecting the whole Church, it was judged not undeservedly to be an equivalent for the severest penance." Pilgrimages, visits to holy places, membership with religious guilds, &c. &c., were regarded as acts involving the same idea, and so entitled to the same privileges.

A further stage in this downward progress was yet to be reached. Hitherto the objects proposed as the subject matter of Indulgences, had been connected with the interests of religion, or at least of the Church. But if any merely worldly object were approved by the Clergy, why might not the same authority apply to alms given in its behalf the same benefits? Thus it came to pass that any work, however purely secular, which for any reason the

¹ Ullmann remarks that the first powerful stimulus given to the spread of the principle of Indulgences was through the Crusade movement at the great Council of Clermont, in the year 1096. Vol. i. p. 37.

Church authorities desired to carry out, might be urged forward by the same inducement. Not merely were churches generally built or repaired by this means, Morinus mentions also the construction of "bridges and highways," as included within the scope of Indulgences.

This extraordinary power was at first committed to the Pope, and it was always regulated by his express authority; but its immediate exercise was not limited to him. Bishops generally received authority to bestow the same privileges at their own discretion. "It might happen," observes Morinus, "that several Bishops being together present at the consecration of a church, and each offering indulgences for sale, the same individual might obtain the much desired boon from more than one Bishop, thus indefinitely multiplying immunities from the temporal penalties due by him, whether in this world or the next, to the justice of God."¹

The pastors of the Church offered commutations of penance under this comprehensive formula: "Whosoever shall have fulfilled this work, or strive with all his might for its fulfilment, shall obtain the remission of all his sins."² This was indeed but technical language, and meant originally to imply only the remission of the penalties due to sin. But the popular mind would be always ready to confound the two; for what but fear of the penalty of sin ordinarily causes apprehension at the commission of sin? To remit the one is felt to be, as the ecclesiastical formula literally expressed it, to remit the other.

The least effect of such an application of spiritual power was the dissolution of ecclesiastical discipline. "For," as Morinus observes, "who would be willing to endure such long and hard penances by night and by day, if for one denarius, or even one obolus, paid under the direction of a

¹ Mor. de Poen. l. x. cap. xx. sec. 11.

² L. x. cap. xix. sec. 100.

Bishop, he could satisfy the fourth part of the canonical penance, and by trebling the sum altogether expunge the whole debt?" A profounder wrong, one from which all Western Christendom, equally with ourselves, still keenly suffers, was the prostitution, and consequent disparagement, of the grace of Absolution, which at such an easy cost, and through such questionable means, could almost at will be at once secured.

It is true, that all Indulgences were by the express tenor of their provisions available only to those who were penitent, and had confessed their sins. Thus ran the form of the Indulgence. Thus far professedly at least the principle of the ancient penitential discipline was preserved. We cannot doubt but that all possible care was taken by the more earnest of the Clergy to preserve the true penitential spirit in the application of the modern system. But the effort needed to obtain an Indulgence was so slight, the gain so immense, so incalculable, that every conceivable inducement was held out to meet the requirements by which it could be obtained at the lowest cost of self-sacrifice. Moreover, the true value of the conditions which the form of the Indulgence implied, must be estimated by the view which with the highest sanction prevailed as to the nature and degree of the penitence required. The supposed meritoriousness of the mere act of confession must likewise be taken into account. Morinus puts the case of one who confesses, and is absolved without any even the lowest degree of sorrow for his sins—"non est absolutus non attritus." In the judgment of all it was certain that such a person had not received grace, that he still remained in a state of sin. But suppose that while being in a state of sin, he had executed the task required in order to obtain the Indulgence? What did the Indulgence profit him? Morinus quotes S. Raymund's answer to the question:

"Indulgences avail a sinner, if he make' an offering from pious devotion, though imperfect, for the sake of attaining grace. For to this end all other alms avail, and every good work."

Albertus Magnus says still more strongly: "Indulgences avail to all, as well to those who are in mortal sin, as to those who are in a state of grace, though after a different manner. To those in a state of grace, they avail for the diminution of expiatory punishment, whether actually imposed, or to be imposed, if the priest should have erred. But to those in mortal sin they avail in two ways; partly in that one man can merit for another the first grace of conversion, if he, the sinner, pray, and fast, and perform other good works according to his ability; for if an individual can effect this, much more can the Church by means of the treasure of common merits which an Indulgence imputes to him: and partly because works good in their kind approximate a person who does them to grace, in that grace passes as a quality to such sinners as are worthy of justification through the merit of congruity, though not being simply worthy."¹

It is scarcely possible to contemplate the aspect which society and the Church must needs have presented under the full influences of such a system, without feeling that the time was ripe for the reconstruction of the Church's penitential discipline, and in order to this end, a return to an earlier and purer faith and practice; and further, that if attempts at reformation were continually obstructed and

¹ "Quod opera de genere bonorum vicinant hominem gratiæ, eo quod procedit ut quiddam in peccatoribus quibusdam, ut dicit Ambrosius, qui digni sunt justificatione dignitate congruentiæ non dignitatis." L. x. c. xxii. sec. 12. See on the whole subject of Indulgences l. x. cap. xvii.—xxii., passim.

overruled by authority, when earnest minds had perceived the contrast between the earlier and later teaching of the Church, and this in a matter touching so closely the whole question of morals and the soul's inmost life and communion with God, sooner or later a rupture within the Church was inevitable.

Before closing this review of the mediæval system, the main principles at least of which are embodied in the discipline of the Church of Rome, a caution is needed, lest an undue charge lie against that great portion of the Catholic Church, especially when our own manifold defects should make us the more fearful of condemning others, and defects as to this very subject, not indeed in our principles, as hereafter will be shown, but in our faithfulness to them.

Many were the efforts made previous to the Reformation to obtain the correction of abuses arising from the principles described. The Council of Trent e.g. was convened partly with the view of effecting such remedies. Moreover the pastoral work and writings of the saints and masters of the spiritual life, formed within the communion of Rome, must be studied before any fair opinion can be formed as to what the application of its penitential discipline, even with such views of doctrine, is capable of being made. Their practical counsels and exhortations must always be reckoned among the most valuable aids to all who, under any system, would learn the critical art of guiding souls.¹ They often speak as the simplest natural piety would dictate, interpreting the decisions of the schools so as to meet all the wants

¹ In illustration of the mode in which the principles objected to are, sometimes at least, explained and practically applied in the Roman Communion, let two extracts be considered, one from the writings of a Saint before our time, the other from those of a great teacher but just departed to his rest. Both extracts relate to the same point, namely,

of the truly penitent. Such decisions are evidently capable of being applied in perfect consistency with what any devout mind could accept. Practically, moreover, points of

the care to be taken to enforce the need of contrition, notwithstanding the doctrine which teaches the sufficiency of mere attrition.

S. Charles Borromeo thus writes : " Mais ils (prêtres) rechercheront avec beaucoup de soin la préparation intérieure, qui est *nécessaire* à ceux qui se présentent à ce sacrement, laquelle consiste en avoir fait un très-exact et diligent examen de ses péchés, et en avoir conçu une douleur proportionnée à leur énormité, avec un ferme propos et une résolution constante de satisfaire aux péchés qu'on a commis, et de s'amender à l'avenir. C'est pourquoi les confesseurs s'efforceront de persuader par raison à ceux dans lesquels ils remarqueront que cette préparation n'est pas, de s'en retourner pour se préparer dignement. . . . Le confesseur doit prendre garde que quand il voit que les pénitents ont fait de leur côté quelque diligence pour se préparer dignement à la confession, et que néanmoins, ou pour leur incapacité, ou pour quelque autre sujet, il ne leur semble pas qu'ils aient les dispositions *nécessaires*, il doit suppléer à cela, s'efforçant de les exciter à la contrition de leurs péchés . . . et avec cela il les doit porter et les disposer de sorte qu'ils soient pour le moins si attristés de tous et d'un chacun de leurs péchés mortels, qu'il les puisse absoudre avec sûreté de conscience." Quoted by Gaum, Manuel des Confesseurs, pp. 229—231.

Again, Père de Ravignan says : " Il y a la pénitence intérieure et la pénitence extérieure. La pénitence intérieure n'est autre chose que la contrition. C'est la douleur, le regret de nos péchés, avec la ferme détermination de ne plus les commettre à l'avenir. Cette pénitence intérieure vous le savez bien est *absolument nécessaire* pour recevoir la remission des péchés. C'est une disposition précieuse qu'il faut demander à Dieu, qu'il faut nourrir en soi, et qui produit les plus grands résultats ; car c'est cette douleur de nos fautes qui nous fait prendre des généreuses résolutions de ne plus les commettre, avec le secours de la grâce divine, qui ne nous manque jamais. La pénitence extérieure est le fruit de la première ; elle résulte de la pénitence intérieure. Et en effet si nous sommes contrits, repentants, humiliés devant Dieu au souvenir de nos offenses," &c. Entretiens Spirituelles. Paris, 1862. La pénitence.

It is evident that these great teachers and guides of souls here speak independently of the systems of the schools. Their own true life

doctrine such as we have been considering, are for the most part withdrawn from ordinary cognizance, tell only, as it were, at a distance, and may have a comparatively slight effect on the religious life. It is also to be borne in mind, that principles are always open to be largely modified in practice. Systems, when acted upon, do not always produce the results, which in theory legitimately flow from them. They must always depend in large measure on their administrators, as well as on the circumstances under which they are administered.

Nevertheless, after all the abatements which ought to be taken into account, before we presume to judge the Roman penitential system, the question still remains, whether the principles which have been detailed are true, or reconcilable with the Apostolic traditions to which the Church is bound to adhere; and, secondly, whether they are not, in proportion as they operate, detrimental to the growth of true ideas of practical religion.

superseded the mediæval theory, though they were formally committed to it. They assert, for instance, the necessity of contrition as a preparation for an acceptable confession, quite as strongly as those who openly reject the doctrine which is at variance with this vital principle.

CHAPTER IV.

THE FOREIGN REFORMERS.

FOR a thousand years and upwards no controversy on the subject of Confession arose. It was, as Mr. Freeman has observed in reference to a similar remarkable fact in the greater instance of the Holy Eucharist, a millennial period, during which the peace of the Church of God on this vital question was undisturbed. The Montanists indeed, and with them their greatest disciple, Tertullian, and afterwards in the third century the Novatians, denied the power of the keys in the remission of the more deadly sins. But the question in these cases was one rather of discipline than of doctrine; for the Church's power to absolve was fully admitted, only the inexpediency of applying this power in the case of certain heinous sins, was urged on the ground that encouragement might thereby be given to commit such sins. It was argued that persons thus guilty ought to lie under a permanent ban of excommunication, and be committed to the mercy of God in another world. This resistance to the Church's penitential system rather proved its spiritual power: for the very efficacy of the Church's absolution was the cause of the desire to limit its exercise to certain cases. The object of the Montanists was to obtain a high standard of morals; and it was thought that the greater severity would be the more powerful means

of effecting this object. Moreover these were everywhere condemned heresies.

Nor, again, did the substitution of private in the place of public Penance, provoke opposition. This new custom was the unavoidable result of the altered circumstances of society, and involved no change in doctrine. There was indeed the loss of the intercessions of the people, and of the greater humiliation which the public exposure involved. But Confession, penitential discipline and Absolution, remained as before ; and these constituted the essence of the ministry. Its spiritual form and grace depended neither on its publicity, nor on the intercessions of the congregation, but on the institution of CHRIST embodied in special acts. Nevertheless, during the latter portion of this period changes were going on, and gradually establishing themselves in the practice of the Church, which prepared the way for, though they did not in themselves involve, the revolution in doctrine which formed the subject of the preceding chapter. The law of compulsory Confession in the thirteenth century was the practical turning point of the change of system. This new law had a twofold effect. It made Confession compulsory, where there was no deadly sin ; and in the case of deadly sin it, at least practically, disallowed the special prerogative of contrition as acceptable even in default of Penance, though ordinarily necessary. It thus upset the balance by which the two contrasted elements of primitive truth had been maintained. It exalted the ministerial agency to the detriment of the soul's own secret communion with GOD, thus giving an exaggerated preponderance to one member of the complex system.¹ The mutual action of

¹ Perrone, stating the modern Roman belief, shows how the Council of Trent allows, that "contrition, when perfected by charity, reconciles many to GOD before the Sacrament of Penance is actually received ;" but he adds, "it further teaches that this reconciliation is not to be

these two elements of the system was disturbed ; and as in the material world disorder would arise from an undue impulse given to one of two balanced forces, so in the spiritual world the doctrine of priestly authority, set free from the counteracting influences exercised on it by the power of the secret contrition of the heart, introduced confusion into the laws of repentance and reconciliation with God. The disturbance thus created was still further increased by the various theories already described, which more and more penetrated the scholastic theology, and slowly but inevitably aroused the spirit of resistance. The enforcement of the absolute necessity of Confession, or its intention, for the remission of sin, combined with the new views of satisfaction and of supererogatory works of merit ; and these doctrines finding their expression in the sale of Indulgences, and

attributed to contrition, unless the purpose of confession be included in it (*sine sacramenti voto.*)” C. ii. s. 37. Thus Confession is still represented as an absolute necessity, although the grace of reconciliation is supposed to be obtained before it is fulfilled in act, and therefore really without it. The Jansenists sought to restore the ancient belief, that perfect contrition with charity reunites a man to God. This proposition, however, was condemned, and Bellarmine even refutes the opinion, though still held by some Roman Divines, that an exception is to be made in the case of death being imminent (*in articulo mortis.*) The supposition of others, that pardon may in some extreme cases be obtained without such intention,—“*raro, in casu nempe necessitatis, ac deficiente confessarii copiâ, non autem ordinarie, neque frequenter, multo minus semper,*”—was equally condemned. Tract. cap. ii. 71, &c.

Perrone represents, in the following brief statement, the exact modern Roman view of the Sacrament of Penance : “*Contrition and Confession constitute the essence of the Sacrament, and suffice for (conferunt) the remission of the guilt of eternal punishment. Satisfaction constitutes its integrity, and serves for the remission of that part of the temporal punishment, which for the most part remains after the Sacrament, to be borne either in this life or in the life to come.*” Cap. iv. sec. 183.

this further aggravated by the abuses attending their promiscuous application,—finally provoked throughout Europe the reaction which forms the subject of the present chapter.

“From the thirteenth century, when the system reached its maturity, loud and many were the voices raised by learned theologians, preachers, and poets, in condemnation of the sale of Indulgences, or in endeavours to bring it back to the purity of its origin, and separate it from all that was injurious to morality. The worse the corruption grew, the louder and more powerful became the opposition. In the course of the fifteenth century especially it spread far and wide, and assumed a character of greater determination; and at last, at the commencement of the sixteenth, it gave the watchword of the Reformation in the theses of Luther.”¹

Dr. Ullmann has accumulated copious illustrations of the line of attack made by the Reformers, still living within the Roman Obedience, before the crisis of the German Reformation. The two from whose writings he quotes most largely, John of Wesel and John Wessel, were both born within the century in the course of which the Reformation took place, and had apparently the greatest influence in forming the mind of the succeeding generation; for Luther said of the former, that “he had studied his writings for his degree,” and of the latter, that “it might seem as if he received from him all that he knew.”²

It is most important to observe that the attacks of these forerunners of the Reformation were directed, not against the essential principles either of Confession or Absolution, but against incidental doctrines, or modes of ministration, intimately associated with them, and which, as we have already seen, had so vitally affected their original character.

¹ Ullmann's “Reformers before the Reformation” (vol. i. p. 250,) translated into English, and published by Clarke, Edinburgh.

² “Reformers before the Reformation,” Preface, p. xiii.

Wesel embodied the main points of his argument against the prevailing system of his day, in the seven following propositions :—

“ 1. On every one who has infringed His law, GOD, as Lawgiver, in the exercise of His justice, imposes a penalty, and this penalty He does not remit, although, in His mercy, He may forgive the guilt ; for, as Augustine says, GOD is always merciful in a way that leaves free course to His justice.

“ 2. Christian Priests, to whom are committed the keys of heaven, are the ministers of GOD in the remission of guilt.

“ 3. The penalty which GOD has imposed upon a transgressor, no man can forgive ; for nothing can resist the Divine will.

“ 4. The Holy Scriptures nowhere state, that any Priest, or even the Pope, can grant an indulgence which shall liberate a man from the penalties denounced against him by GOD.

“ 5. The Pope, however, has it in his power to absolve from the penalties which even a positive law has denounced for sin, because the Pope is appointed by the Church the founder of positive law, in as far as it subserves the Church's edification, and not its destruction.

“ 6. That the penalties which man or positive law has denounced, correspond with the awards of GOD's penal justice, in such a manner as that when they are annulled, GOD's justice is also satisfied, is by no means certain, unless it has been revealed by GOD. For the Divine will (which of course means, in such particular cases) is unknown to man, and nothing is said of this in Scripture.

“ 7. The opinion of theological teachers regarding a treasure of the Church, accumulated from the merits of CHRIST, and other supererogatory works of the Saints, and

committed to the charge of the Pope, is undoubtedly very pious, but is at the same time an opinion to which certain modest objections may be profitably made. In particular it may be objected, that the Saints have left behind them on earth no such treasure, because the Scripture says, 'their works do follow them.' So long as the Saints sojourn in this life, their works are by their very nature transitory; and when the Saints cease to labour, their works have no independent existence of their own, but in as far as, through the grace of God, they are in any degree meritorious, they follow their authors from the scene of their labours, and enter with them into rest."¹

Again, Wessel, "by no means rejecting the sacrament of penitence, understood as inward sorrow and outward confession of sin, rather calling earnestly for both," contests the scholastic definition of the constituent parts of Penance, viz. contrition, confession, and satisfaction. He reasserts the ancient belief, that confession is "not absolutely necessary to obtain forgiveness, but is only a guarantee of true repentance." He also argues at length against the prevailing theory of satisfaction, and of the doctrine on which it mainly rested, namely, the Priest's power to judge, and apportion by his sentence the due amount of punishment.

"Sacramental confession is, as respects its form, not judicial, so that if a sentence, and that a strict sentence of a confession be omitted, the act of the party making the confession, and the act of him who administers the absolution, would not be a true sacrament. For it is sufficient for the truth of an efficacious sacrament, that the penitent speak the truth, and that the confessor, after receiving the confession, pronounce absolution without stating a judicial opinion." Again; "They (who affirm satisfaction to form an essential

¹ "Reformers before the Reformation," vol. i. pp. 260, 1.

part of penitence) do not recognize the full efficacy of the sacrament, inasmuch as they deny that the pardon of the King suffices for forgiveness. They also falsify the words of the absolution, and after saying, 'I absolve,' yet bind the penitent and dismiss him unabsolved. But what is worst of all, they likewise subject the whole sacrament to danger, because they protract it (i.e., postpone its proper efficacy) until the penance enjoined has been fully paid. Accordingly, if in the meanwhile, and before the sacrament is perfected, the penitent from frailty commit another lapse, he interposes an obstacle in one part, and thereby nullifies the whole of the sacrament. For things which constitute an essential unity are by the nullity of one rendered all null."¹

Luther held a similar course, not indiscriminately condemning the whole system, rather carefully maintaining the ancient belief in Confession and Absolution as to essential features, only with one notable exception. But this exception tended to vitiate all that he retained of sacramental truth. Luther's solifidianism, i.e., his habit of reducing all operations of grace to exercises or results of faith, entered into his views of Penance. He regarded sacraments, not as means of conveying the grace which they exhibit, but as mere stimulants, which, when presented to the soul, excite faith, and so work on the consciousness. Thus Absolution, in Luther's scheme, is but the exhibition of the promised forgiveness of God, which the soul by its own act appropriates to itself.²

The Lutheran doctrine is thus explained in the Augsburg Confession of Faith. The expressions which mark the prevailing solifidianism, are given in italics.

¹ "Reformers before the Reformation," vol. ii. pp. 540, 1.

² "Omnia sacramenta ad fidem alendam sunt instituta."—Op. Sen.,

"First, we teach the necessity of contrition, i.e., of real terror and grief of mind, acknowledging the wrath of God, lamenting its sin, and leading to amendment of life. . . . Faith is to be added, i.e., a sure trust in the mercy promised through CHRIST, a settled belief that sin is remitted freely for His sake. *When in the midst of grief for sin we are raised up by such faith, we surely obtain the remission of our sins: and this faith is conceived by the soul by means of the Gospel, and also through absolution which announces and applies the Gospel to the terrified conscience.* Therefore we teach that private absolution is to be retained in the Church, and we greatly extol (*amplissimis laudibus ornamus*) its value and the power of the keys: because the power of the keys applies the Gospel, not only generally to all, but privately to individuals . . . and we ought to trust to the voice of the Gospel, conveyed to us by the ministry of the Church in absolution, as to a voice sounding out of heaven. . . .

tom. iii. fol. 266, b. Melancthon also said, in his "Loci Theologici," "Apparet quam nihil sacramenta sunt, nisi fidei exercendæ *μνημόσυνα.*"

The opinions of the later Lutherans however varied on this point, and they at last returned to the full belief of the Catholic Church.

In their "disputes with the Sacramentarians, the Reformers of Württemberg," says Moehler, "approximated again to the doctrine of the Church." The "Apology" goes beyond the Augsburg Confession, and attributes to sacraments an actual conveyance of grace. "Sacramentum est ceremonia vel opus, in quo Deus nobis exhibet hoc quod offert annexâ ceremoniæ gratiâ."

Moehler observes that the difference between the Lutherans and the Church, as to the nature of a sacrament, after a time altogether disappeared. "Macheineke," he says, "admits this at least, and says the difference between the two Confessions consists simply in this, that Catholics teach sacramenta *continere* gratiam; Protestants, on the other hand, inculcate, sacramenta *conferre* gratiam."—Moehler's Symbolism, Robertson's translation, vol. i. pp. 294, 295.

“Moreover, since confession gives occasion for administering private absolution, and the rite itself *maintains among the people the knowledge* of the power of the keys, and remission of sins; and further, because of its great value for the guidance and instruction of men’s souls, we therefore carefully retain confession in our Church; but yet we teach that the numbering of sins is not necessary by the law of God, nor that consciences ought to be burdened by such numbering.¹ For there is no precept in the Apostolic writings requiring this numbering. Moreover, the exact enumeration of all sin is impossible, as is written in the Psalm: ‘Who can tell how oft he offendeth?’ Also Jeremiah says, ‘the heart of man is inscrutable.’ And if no sins are remitted, unless they are openly confessed, the conscience can never rest, because the greater number of sins can neither be perceived, nor remembered. For which reason it is easy to be understood, that the ministry of absolution and remission of sin does not depend on this numbering.

“Lastly, there is the greatest need, that the minds of the devout should be warned on the subject of satisfactions; for these have been more hurtful than the

The context shows that by “numbering of sins” is not meant the free unburdening of a guilty conscience, but the harassing pressure of a forced examination in detail, coupled with the idea that the hope of forgiveness rests not on the truth of the repentance, but on the exactness of the enumeration. The character of the practice alluded to, is evident from the terms expressive of distress applied to it, as e.g., in the preface to the Saxon Confession of Faith, where the “numbering of sins” is described as “*carnificina conscientiarum, impediens fidem et invocationem.*”

As the special object of confession, according to the prevailing practice, was not so much to ascertain the truth of the repentance, but rather the amount of sin, in order to apportion the penance, the reason for such “numbering” is evident.

numbering of sins. Satisfactions have obscured the gracious gift of CHRIST, because the unlearned were wont to think that the remission of guilt was obtained through their own works, and, if anything were omitted, they were troubled. Moreover, ceremonies, pilgrimages, and unprofitable works of this kind, were more esteemed than the Divine commandments. And even the learned themselves feigned that eternal death was compensated by these things. Therefore we teach that canonical satisfactions profit not towards the remission of guilt, or of eternal punishment, neither are they necessary. Formerly it was the custom not to receive back the fallen to the peace of the Church, unless certain penalties were enjoined for example's sake. From this custom satisfactions arose; but the ancients, by such example, sought to deter people from sinning, not imagining that the act enjoined was a compensation for sin, or eternal punishment. Unlearned men afterwards thus feigned. But those ancient customs have grown obsolete in the lapse of years. We do not, therefore, load the conscience with satisfactions, but teach that the necessary fruits of repentance, obedience, fear of GOD, faith, love, charity, and universal newness of spirit,—ought to grow in us.

“We admonish, also, that sins are often punished by temporal penalties in this life, as David, Manasseh, and many others were punished. And we teach, that these punishments are mitigated by good works and repentance, as Paul teaches, ‘If we judge ourselves, we shall not be judged of the LORD.’

“Thus formerly the disputes concerning penance were inextricable, and full of absurd opinions, but now the reformed doctrine is so delivered to the people, as to be intelligible and conducive to piety. We retain and teach the true facts of penance, viz., contrition, faith, absolution, re-

mission of sins, amendment of life, and mitigation of temporal punishment.”¹

Hooker thus describes the Lutheran doctrine and its practical working :—“ But concerning confession in private, the Churches of Germany, as well the rest, as the Lutherans, agree all, that all men should at certain times confess their offences to GOD in the hearing of GOD’s ministers, thereby to show how their sins displease them ; to receive instruction for the wariar carriage of themselves hereafter, to be soundly resolved if any scruple, or snare of conscience, do entangle their minds ; and, which is most material, to the end that men may at GOD’s hands seek every one his own particular pardon, through the power of those keys, which the minister of GOD using according to our Blessed SAVIOUR’S institution in that case, it is their part to accept the benefit thereof, as GOD’S most merciful ordinance for their good, and without any distrust or doubt, to embrace joyfully His grace so given them, according to the word of our LORD, which hath said, ‘ Whose sins ye remit, they are remitted.’ So that grounding upon this assured belief they are to rest with minds encouraged and persuaded concerning the forgiveness of all their sins as out of CHRIST’S own word and power by the ministry of the keys.”²

Calvin in this, as in all questions touching sacramental life and ordinances, had the melancholy distinction of being the first wholly to pervert the ancient belief. He scrupled not to overthrow the unvarying traditions of fifteen centuries, and, as far as his teaching and influence extended, to deprive one of the most solemn institutions of CHRIST, one most intimately bearing on the life and peace of the

¹ The Saxon Confession of Faith entirely coincides in substance with that of Augsburg, in the article of “ Penance.”

Eccl. Pol. b. vi. c. iv. s. 14. See note at the end of this chapter.

soul, of its true efficacy and covenanted grace. What Luther retained of ministerial order and grace, though with a theory of his own, which neutralized its objective power and reality, this Calvin altogether erased from his system. The deep impression of his powerful mind is vividly manifest to the present day in the total absence of any sacramental conception of Confession and Absolution, wherever his influence has spread.

Calvin indeed recommended Confession, as, e.g., in his *Institutes*, where he says ; "Let every believer remember that it is his duty, if he feels such secret anguish and affliction from a sense of his sins, that he cannot extricate himself without some exterior aid, not to neglect the remedy offered to him by the LORD, which is, that in order to alleviate his distress, he should use the private confession with his pastor, and, to obtain consolation, should privately implore his assistance, whose office is, both publicly and privately, to comfort the people of GOD with the doctrine of the Gospel."¹ The Swiss Confession of Faith also upholds private confession. But Confession as understood in the Swiss system, is altogether different from the Lutheran view of it.

The Lutherans were careful to preserve the connection between Confession and the ministry of the keys, and Absolution, as the ordinance in which this ministry is exercised. The Swiss Reformers, on the contrary, represent Confession to be merely a means of spiritual discipline or teaching, irrespective of the remission of sins, such as might be administered by a layman equally as by an ordained minister of GOD, and Absolution as identical with preaching or expounding the Gospel. As Calvin taught a doctrine of the Eucharist, which made our LORD'S Presence to depend on the faith of the receiver, not on the act of consecration,

¹ *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, I. iii. c. iv. sec. 12.

so he invented a theory of penance having no reference to an ordained ministry. His views are thus expressed in the Swiss Confession of Faith :—

“It is necessary that we confess our sins to GOD our FATHER, and be reconciled with our brother, if we have offended him. Of which kind of confession James the Apostle speaking says ; ‘Confess your sins one to another.’ If any one, moreover, oppressed with the weight of sin and perplexing temptations, desire privately to seek counsel, instruction, and consolation, either of a minister of the Church, or *any other brother learned in the law of God*, we condemn it not. In like manner we greatly approve, as accordant with the Scriptures, the general and public confession of sins, wont to be made in Church and in public assemblies.

“Concerning the keys of the kingdom of heaven, delivered by our LORD to His Apostles, many speak marvellous things, and of them forge swords, lances, sceptres, and crowns, and plenary power against mightiest kingdoms, and against souls and bodies. We, judging simply by the word of GOD, affirm that all ministers duly called have and exercise the keys, when they preach the Gospel, i.e., instruct the people committed to their charge, exhort, control, rebuke, and rule with discipline. For thus they open the kingdom of heaven to the obedient, and close it against the disobedient. . . . *They use the keys, when they lead to faith and repentance. Thus they reconcile to God. Thus they remit sins. Ministers absolve duly and efficaciously when they preach the Gospel, and in it the remission of sins promised to individual believers*, testifying, as in the case of baptism, that it belongs specially to individuals.”

Hooker’s account of the practice of the French Protestants—the same applies to all Communities formed, like the French, after the Swiss model—is as follows :—

“Private confession to the minister alone touching secret crimes, or absolution thereupon ensuing, as the one to the other, is neither practised by the French discipline, nor used in any of those churches which have been cast by the French mould. Open confession to be made in the face of the whole congregation by notorious malefactors they hold necessary, howbeit not necessary towards the remission of sins, but only in some sort to content the Church, and that one man’s sympathy may seem to strengthen many, which before have been weakened by one man’s fall.”¹

The history of the practice of Confession in these two Protestant Communities, illustrates the essential difference of the principles on which their views were respectively grounded. Among the followers of Calvin Confession has altogether ceased. Such a practice could not be expected to live as a mere model of discipline, without any promise or result as to the forgiveness of sin. Among the Lutherans on the other hand Confession is practised at the present day, and, though subject to occasional decline, yet in revivals of spiritual life the desire for its more frequent use continually revives also.² An instance of such a revival occurred so late as May, 1856, when a Conference, representing the Protestants of Saxony, Bavaria, Wurtemberg, and other German states, was held at Dresden, and a reso-

¹ Eccl. Pol. b. vi. ch. vi. s. 14. See the note at the end of this chapter. The writer also begs to refer to some remarks on the character of Calvinistic teaching as regards the Sacraments, in his volume on the “Doctrine of the Priesthood,” c. iii. (Masters.)

² Melancthon’s striking language, quoted by the late Mr. Newland in a pamphlet, entitled, “Confession as it is in the Church of England,” is an instance of the doctrine impressed on the Lutheran mind by the early German Reformers. “Impium esset de ecclesiâ privatam Absolutionem tollere. Neque quid sit remissio peccatorum, aut potestas clavium, intelligunt, si qui privatam absolutionem aspernantur.”

tion was passed, affirming "the necessity of re-establishing the use of regular confession and absolution."¹

The comparison between these two Protestant Communities proves, that where, as in the case of the Lutherans, Catholic antiquity is respected as a standard of truth, there Confession is maintained in connection with the ministry of reconciliation ; and only where, as in the case of the Swiss or Calvinistic Communities, Catholic antiquity is disregarded, and the Church's primitive traditions wholly set aside, Confession and Absolution are no longer believed to possess a sacramental virtue, or to have any effect in the reconciliation of the penitent to God.

This comparison has an important bearing on the question of Confession in the Church of England, which has uniformly professed to rest its interpretations of doctrine on the judgment of the early Catholic Church. For the fact that the Lutherans, looking in this matter to the same sources of authority, as the standard of truth, with ourselves, have come to the same conclusion, is a strong confirmation of the truth, which we claim as the legitimate heritage of the Church of England.

¹ An account of the Conference was given in the *Guardian* of Nov. 22, 1856, being copied from the *Deutsche Volksblatt*. The following form of absolution was then determined on : "Almighty GOD have mercy upon you, and by the authority of our LORD JESUS CHRIST I absolve you from all your sins, in the Name of the FATHER, and of the SON, and of the HOLY GHOST. Amen. Go in peace. Amen."

NOTE.

I. The following extracts illustrate the practical working of the rule of Confession in the Lutheran Communities :—

Extracts from the Evangelical Liturgy. (*Evangelische Handagende*,)
 Edited by G. C. Dieffenbach and C. Müller. Stuttgart, S. G. Liesching. 1858. Page 325.

“PRIVATE CONFESSION.—First Form.

“How simple (*einfältig*) folk are to be taught to confess. (From Dr. M. Luther’s small Catechism.)

“What is Confession?

“Confession includes two things : *first*, to confess one’s sins ; secondly, to receive the absolution or pardon from the confessor as if from GOD Himself, not doubting, but surely believing, that sin is *thereby* forgiven by GOD Himself in heaven.

“What sins are to be confessed?

“We shall acknowledge all sins before GOD, even those we are not aware of, as we do in the LORD’S Prayer. But to the confessor we shall only acknowledge such sins as we are aware of and feel in our hearts.

“Which are these?

“See what your situation in the world is, and what the ten commandments say. Whether you be a father, mother, son, daughter, master, mistress, man or maid servant ; whether you have been disobedient, false (lying or unfaithful,) lazy, angry, impure, hating ; whether you have injured any one in words or deeds ; whether you have stolen, been negligent, careless, or have done any other wrong whatever.

“Dear friend, teach me a short way to confess.

“Say to the Father Confessor :

“Reverend dear Sir, I beg you will hear my confession, and give me Absolution of my sins for GOD’S sake.

“I, poor sinful man, confess to GOD and to you that I have greatly sinned against all GOD’S laws in thought, word, and deed ; that by nature I was conceived and born in sin, and deserving death and GOD’S wrath ; wherefore I am heartily sorry that I have drawn upon me the wrath of GOD my LORD, and I do heartily pray that GOD may graciously forgive me all my sins for the sake of our LORD JESUS CHRIST,

special ministry of reconciliation, he may afford it to those that need it. And to this end the people are often to be exhorted to enter into a special examination of the state of their own souls; and that finding themselves either extreme dull or much troubled in mind, they do resort unto GOD's ministers *to receive from them as well advice and counsel* for the quickening of their dead hearts, and the subduing of their corruptions whereunto they have been subject, *as the benefit of absolution likewise for the quieting of their consciences, by the power of the keys which Christ has committed to His ministers for that purpose.*"¹

The "special" ministry of reconciliation evidently denotes the personal or individual, as distinguished from the general, ministry, and the close connection between "advice," &c., and "the benefit of absolution," marked by the particles, "as well," "as likewise," proves that the two are supposed to be given at the same time. It is moreover observable, that the expression, "ministry of GOD's Word," is not used in this canon, but "the power of the keys" is substituted for it, a term unquestionably implying that the ministry intended is an exercise of the strictly priestly office.²

¹ Wilkins' Concilia, tom. iv. p. 501.

² Mr. J. C. Chambers, in his Essay on "Private Confession and Absolution" ("The Church and the World," 1867, note to p. 210,) adds a further testimony as to this point: "Albeit Sacramental Confession and Absolution have been in some places very much abused; yet if any of the people be grieved in mind for any delict or offence committed, and for the unburthening of his conscience confess the same to the Bishop or Presbyter, they shall as they are bound minister to the person so confessing all spiritual consolations out of the Word of GOD: and shall not deny him the benefit of Absolution, after the manner which is prescribed in the Visitation of the Sick, if the party show himself truly penitent and humbly desire to be absolved."—One of the Canons sent up by the Scottish Bishops to Charles I. under his orders, and revised by Laud and Juxon. It is evident in what sense the compilers of this Canon understood the terms of the invitation in question.

tion as being merely a freeing from these, and not in any sense what the Church has always understood it to be. And such absolution is to be pronounced by 'Church officers,' a title which includes the elders and Kirk Session, &c.

"In the larger Westminster Catechism (Questions 171—173) the duty of preparation is explained and enforced: but recourse to GOD's ministers, even in a case of doubtfulness, is never recommended. Even the 'ignorant and scandalous,' are only to 'receive instruction and manifest reformation.'

"I can find nothing to lead me to suppose that the practice as at present existing in the Kirk and other Presbyterian bodies, is anything beyond what is thus laid down. The earnest-minded ministers may deal more closely with the conscience, but all inquiry is into the state of the mind, and has regard rather to the intellectual apprehension of truth, than to the practical application of it to the life and conscience. And I am further convinced that any person coming to the best Presbyterian minister under deep remorse, would receive sympathy indeed and kindness (the men being better Christians than their Calvinistic system,) but that the only ministerial action would be the repetition of Scripture promises, and the general declaration that GOD forgives sinners for CHRIST's sake on their true repentance, and then the offering of prayer for the penitent, all ended by an expression of personal kind wishes in the shape of a 'GOD be with you,' or some other form of blessing.

"The Presbyterians, in short, are in practice very faithful to their theory. And the whole tendency of that theory has been to destroy the idea of personal and priestly authority, and to substitute for it the notion that all authority resides in the general body, and is delegated by them to the officers, who are popularly elected and act as a kind of Committee; and that even this authority does not reach beyond the removal of open scandal, and the decent ordering of the Visible Church."

CHAPTER V.

ENGLISH DIVINES SINCE THE REFORMATION.

IT is not intended here to form a catena of our Divines, though incidentally in the course of our inquiry the opinions of many authors of note will be adduced, sufficient to show how the balance of authority inclines. The object proposed in this chapter is merely to exhibit the mode of treating the subject pursued by those who have been careful to discriminate between our own teaching and that of Rome. More copious extracts therefore than would ordinarily be requisite are given, a few authors only being selected.

Richard Hooker, Jeremy Taylor, and Archbishop Usher, are the three of our Divines of chiefest note, who have canvassed the question of Confession most fully with this special view. They are therefore the fittest authorities for distinguishing the separate theories of Confession, as now held respectively in the two Communion. Their collective judgment will be the more conclusive, because two of them at least are little disposed to favour high sacramental doctrines.

The fact of Hooker himself practising Confession,¹ is enough to prove that his opposition could only be against a certain mode of viewing it, not against the ordinance itself. The following passage, moreover, is inconsistent

Life, by Isaac Walton ; quoted in a later chapter of this work.

with any thought of disparagement ; “Because the knowledge how to handle our own sores is no vulgar and common art, but we either carry towards ourselves for the most part an over soft and gentle hand, fearful of touching too near the quick, or else endeavouring not to be partial, we fall into timorous scrupulosities, and sometimes into those extreme discomforts of mind from which we hardly do ever lift up our heads again ; men thought it the safest way to disclose their secret faults, and to crave imposition of Penance from them whom our LORD JESUS CHRIST hath left in His Church to be spiritual and ghostly physicians, the guides and pastors of redeemed souls, whose office doth not only consist in general persuasions unto amendment of life, but also in the private particular cure of diseased minds. Howsoever the Novatianists presume to plead against the Church, saith Salvianus, that ‘Every man ought to be his own penitentiary, and that it is a part of our duty to exercise, but not of the Church’s authority to impose or prescribe repentance,’ the truth is otherwise, the best and strongest of us may need in such cases direction.”¹

Nor did Hooker demur to the substitution of private for public Confession. He considered this change in the Church’s practice to have become necessary, and traces the evils which he exposes, not to the secrecy, but to the forced obligation, of the more modern rule. “Forasmuch,” he says, “as public confessions became dangerous, . . . it seemed first unto some, and afterwards generally, requisite that voluntary penitents should surcease from open confession. Instead whereof, when once private and secret confession had taken place with the Latins, it continued as a profitable ordinance, till the Lateran Council had decreed that all men once in a year at the least should confess themselves to the Priest.”²

Eccl. Pol. b. vi. ch. iv. 7.

² Ibid. s. 3.

Hooker's opposition was directed primarily against the assumed necessity of Confession. "We everywhere find the use of confession, especially public, allowed of and commended by the Fathers, but that *extreme* and *rigorous necessity* of auricular and private confession, which is at this day so mightily upheld by the Church of Rome, we find not." The same point he urges more in detail in the following passage; "It was not then the faith and doctrine of God's Church, as of the Papacy at this present; (1) That the only remedy for sin after Baptism is sacramental penitency. (2) That confession in secret is an essential part thereof. (3) That God Himself cannot now forgive sins without the Priest. (4) That because forgiveness at the hands of the Priest must arise from confession in the offender, therefore to confess unto him is a matter of such necessity, as being not either in deed, or at the least in desire performed, excludeth utterly from all pardon, and must consequently in Scripture be commanded wheresoever any promise of forgiveness is made. No, no; these opinions have youth in their countenance: antiquity knew them not; it never thought nor dreamed of them."¹

Hooker moreover argues against the threefold definition of the sacrament of penance. "Contrition" he explains to be "an inward thing which belongeth to the virtue and not to the sacrament of repentance, which must consist of external parts, if the nature thereof be external." And he urges further, that being a state of mind, a fitness for receiving grace, it cannot from its very nature be part of a sacrament; "for a sacrament by their doctrine must both signify and also confer or bestow some special Divine grace."²

Moreover Hooker thus explains, while he controverts, the Roman doctrine of satisfaction. "They imagine, be-

¹ Eccl. Pol. b. vi. ch. iv. s. 13.

² Ibid.

yond all conceit of antiquity, that when God doth remit sin, and the punishment eternal thereunto belonging, He reserveth the torments of hell fire to be nevertheless endured for a time, either shorter or longer, according to the quality of men's crimes, yet so that there is between God and man a certain composition (as it were) or contract, by virtue whereof works assigned by the Priest to be done after absolution shall satisfy God, as touching the punishment which He otherwise would inflict for sin pardoned and forgiven."

Against this idea he argues : "They cannot assure any man, that if he perform what the Priest appointeth, it shall suffice," . . . "inasmuch as the Priest hath no power to determine or define of equivalency between sins and satisfactions."¹ And, further, striking at one root of the principle on which the Roman theory of satisfaction rests, he urges, that "if God be satisfied and do pardon sin, our justification restored is as perfect as it was at the first bestowed ;" "that the truth of this doctrine is not to be shifted off by restraining it unto eternal punishment alone ;" "that to be subject to revenge for sin, although the punishment of it be but temporal, is to be under the curse of the law ;" that "if it please God to lay punishment on them whose sins He hath forgiven, yet is not this done for any destructive end of wasting or eating them out, as in plagues inflicted on the impenitent, neither is the punishment of the one as of the other proportioned by the greatness of sin past, but according to that future purpose whereunto the goodness of God referreth it, and wherein there is nothing meant to the sufferer but furtherance of all happiness, now in grace, and hereafter in glory." Finally he quotes a saying of S. Augustine, which he terms "a general axiom for all such chastisements :—" "Before forgiveness they

¹ Eccl. Pol. b. vi. ch. v. s. 9.

are the punishment of sinners ; and after forgiveness, they are exercises and trials of righteous men."

Hooker implies that he was ready to admit Confession and Absolution as component parts of the sacrament of Penance, had Rome been willing thus to limit its definition. "Forasmuch," he says, "as a sacrament is complete, having the matter and form which it ought, what should lead them" (the Roman theologians) "to set down any other part of sacramental repentance, than confession and absolution, as Durandus hath done? . . . Will they draw in contrition with satisfaction which are no parts, and exclude absolution (a principal part,) yea, the very complement, form, and perfection of the rest, as themselves account it."¹

Jeremy Taylor, as will hereafter be shown, in his devotional treatises, recommends Confession more strongly perhaps than any other Divine in our Communion. Even in his controversial treatises on the subject² he opens the discussion by an express disclaimer of any intention to disparage the practice. "Whether," he says, "to confess to a Priest be an advisable discipline, and a good instance, instrument and ministry to repentance, and may serve many good ends in the Church, and to the souls of needing persons, it is no part of the question ;" adding, "the Church of England is no way engaged against it, but advises it, and practises it." Moreover, in common with Hooker, he expresses his approval of the substitution of private for public penance, while yet regretting the necessity for the change. "The old ecclesiastic discipline having passed into desuetude and indevotion, the Latin Church especially kept up some little broken planks of it, which so long as charity and devotion were warm, and secular interest had

¹ See the Eccl. Pol. b. vi. ch. iv. 5.

² "Dissuasive from Popery," Heber's Edit., vol. xi. p. 10.

not turned religion into arts, did in some good measure supply the want of the old better discipline."

Taylor's main argument is directed against the universally compulsory rule. "Let it be commanded," he says, "to all, to whom it is needful or profitable; but let it be free, as to the conscience precisely, and bound but by the cords of a man, and as other ecclesiastical laws are, which are capable of exceptions, restrictions, cautions, dispensations, rescindings and abolitions, by the same authority or upon greater reasons. *The question is, whether to confess all our greater sins to a priest, all that upon strict inquiry we can remember, be necessary to salvation.*"

Again; "When CHRIST said to His Apostles, 'Whose sins ye remit, they shall be remitted to them; and whose sins ye retain, they shall be retained,' He made (says Belarmine, and generally the latter school of Roman doctors,) the Apostles, and all priests, judges upon earth, that without their sentence, no man, that hath sinned after baptism, can be reconciled. But the priests, who are judges, can give no right or unerring sentence, unless they hear all the particulars they are to judge. Therefore by CHRIST's law they are tied to tell in confession all their particular sins to a priest. This is the sum of all that is said in this affair. Other light skirmishes there are, but the main battle is here."

Taylor, moreover, opposes the principle of satisfaction in the sense of the term already shown to have prevailed in mediæval times. The position which he controverts is, "that priests have power to impose a punishment according to the quality of every sin."

Against this theory Taylor argues, and asserts the important principle, that "the judgment the priest is to make, is not of the *sins*, but of the *persons*. It is not said, 'Quæcumque,' but 'Quorumcumque remiseritis peccata.'"

. . . . And therefore it becomes the ministers of souls, to know the state of the penitent, rather than the nature and number of the sins."

Again; "We do not find anything in the words of CHRIST, obliging the priest directly to impose penances on the penitent sinner; he may voluntarily submit himself to them, if he please, and he may do very well, if he do so; but the power of retaining sins, gives no power to punish him, whether he will or no; for the power of retaining is rather to be exercised upon the impenitent than upon the penitent." Again; "If we consider that without true repentance no sin can be pardoned, and with it all sins may, and that no one sin is pardoned as to the final state of our souls, but at the same time all are pardoned, it must needs follow, that it is not the number of sins, but the condition of the person, the change of his life, the sorrow of his heart, the truth of his conversion, and his hatred of all sin, that he is to consider."

In a previous passage Taylor assumes, that priests in receiving confessions, are judges; but he argues against the idea of a "proper judicial power," i.e., as opposed to one ministerial or dependent, which GOD Himself, as He wills, ratifies. He quotes S. Ambrose in proof of his position; "'Men give their ministry in the remission of sins, but they exercise not the right of any power; neither are sins remitted by them in their own, but in the Name of the FATHER, SON, and HOLY SPIRIT. Men pray, but it is GOD Who forgives; it is man's obsequiousness, but the bountiful gift is from GOD. So likewise there is no doubt, sins are forgiven in baptism, but the operation is of the FATHER, SON, and HOLY SPIRIT.'" Here S. Ambrose affirms the priest's power of pardoning sins to be wholly ministerial and optative, or by way of prayer. Just as it is in baptism, so it is in repentance after baptism, sins are pardoned to the

truly penitent; but here is no proper¹ judicial power. The Bishop prays, and God pardons; the priest does his ministry, and God gives the gift." Taylor insists that the sentence of the priest is that of "an ambassador, not a judge;" that "God alone can remit by His own right" but yet to this pardon the Church doth co-operate by its ministry."²

Usher pursues a similar line of argument. He expressly guards himself against being supposed to disapprove the use whether of private or public Confession, while strongly opposing certain details of the Roman practice. "Be it therefore known unto him, that no kind of coercion, either public or private, is disallowed by us, though requisite for the due execution of that ancient power of keys, which CHRIST bestowed upon His Church."³ His first and main attack is directed against the compulsory rule. "The thing which we reject is that new picklock sacramental confession, obtruded upon men's consciences as a *matter necessary to salvation*." He argues also against the idea of absolution being more than "ministerial," or, as he explains the term, "operative through the efficacy of prayer and the gift of the HOLY GHOST, which God imparts for the remission of sins through the ministry of the priest." "But our new masters," he says, "will not content themselves with such a ministerial power of forgiving sins, as hath been spoken of, unless we yield that they have authority so to do properly, directly, and absolutely." He also opposes the idea of "the sinner being thereby, [i.e.,

¹ For the meaning of the term "proper" in English theology, the writer begs to refer to chapter xii. in his "Doctrine of the Priesthood in the Church of England."

² "Dissuasive from Popery," Heber's Edit., vol. xi. p. 10, seq. passim.

³ Usher's Works. Oxford Edit., vol. iii. 91.

absolution,] immediately acquitted before God, howsoever that sound conversion of heart be wanting in him, which otherwise would be requisite. For a conditional absolution, upon such terms as these, 'If thou dost believe and repent as thou oughtest to do,' is, in these men's judgments, to no purpose, and can give no security to the penitent; seeing it dependeth upon an uncertain condition." He opposes "the absolute power of the keys," and adds; "To think that it lieth in the power of any priest truly to absolve a man from his sins, without implying the condition of 'his believing and repenting as he ought to do,' is both presumption and madness in the highest degree."

Usher especially controverts the idea, on which the above statement is grounded, of attrition becoming contrition through grace given in Confession. "Now that contrition is at all times necessarily required for obtaining remission of sins and justification, is a matter determined by the Fathers of Trent. But mark yet the mystery. They equivocate with us in the term contrition, and make a distinction thereof into perfect and imperfect. The former of these is contrition properly; the latter they call attrition, which, howsoever in itself it be not true contrition, yet when the priest, with his power of forgiving sins, interposeth himself in the business, they tell us that 'attrition, by virtue of the keys, is made contrition;' that is to say, that a sorrow arising from a servile fear of punishment, on such a fruitless repentance as the reprobate may carry with them to hell, by virtue of the priest's absolution, is made so fruitful that it shall serve the turn for obtaining forgiveness of sins, as if it had been that godly sorrow which worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of. By which spiritual cozenage many poor souls are most miserably deluded, while they persuade themselves that upon the receipt of the priest's acquittance, upon this carnal sorrow of theirs, all

scores are cleared until that day ; and then by beginning upon a new reckoning, they sin and confess, confess and sin afresh, and tread this round so long till they put off all saving repentance, and so the blind following the blind, both at last fall into the pit.”¹

It must be borne in mind, that the question here proposed is not whether these Divines state fairly, without prejudice or exaggeration, the particular points of Roman doctrine which they controvert. They may, or not, err in this respect without in the least affecting the conclusion to establish which their evidence is adduced. The object of these extracts is simply to prove, that such authors, and consequently the schools of English theology which they represent, in condemning certain details of the later use of Confession, do not thereby condemn Confession itself ; and that their desire manifestly is to distinguish, and separate off, views associated without sufficient authority with the essential features of the original institution which they unquestionably uphold.

It is moreover to be observed as a most remarkable and pregnant circumstance, that the same difficulties and objections on the question of Confession have been felt both within and without the Roman Obedience ; for the points of doctrine and practice controverted by our Divines coincide with those which, as already has been shown, formed the subjects of attack on the part of Reformers before the Reformation. This agreement between our own Divines and the opponents of the schoolmen proves, that our dissent from Rome is but a continuation of the same protest which many of her children, and those of great learning and ability, raised within her own Communion, until the Council of Trent silenced all questionings. In both cases, before and

¹ Usher's Works. Oxford Edit., vol. iii. 91.

after the Reformation, the resistance has been not to Confession itself, or any one of its original essential principles, but to certain incidental, though in themselves and in their effect upon Confession most momentous, features, which can be proved to have been developed in mediæval times, and to be at variance with primitive belief.

Should it therefore ever in the tender mercies of God come to pass, that the heart of Rome be turned to her fathers, stirred to test her doctrines by their teaching, seeking the reunion of Christendom by a return to the revelations once and for ever delivered to the saints, the basis of agreement must be laid in the principles to which many of her own leading theologians referred in the controversies which preceded the unhappy separation of so large a portion of the western world from her Communion, and which are our justification and support in the witness which, however painfully, we are still constrained to bear in defence of the Apostolical traditions entrusted to us.

¹In considering such doctrinal statements, as well as the changes made in our offices, which, together with other expressions of the mind of our Reformers, will subsequently occupy our attention, it is specially necessary to bear in mind the great difficulties besetting them on every side. Their difficulties were not merely on the part of Rome, but also on that of Puritanism, which, even at the commencement of the Reformation, had become a formidable power, as an extreme reaction against Rome.

¹ The following portion of this chapter has been added in the Second Edition, in consequence of a suggestion by a friendly critic in the "Ecclesiastic," January, 1865. The writer complained of the omission in the First Edition, of any allusion to the Puritan views prevalent at the time of the Reformation, and increasing the difficulties against which our Reformers had to contend.

The most strongly controverted point in the Penitential discipline was the doctrine of satisfaction. As to the Divine authority of Confession and its benefits, as well as the sacramental grace of Absolution, speaking generally, there was then, as before observed, no controversy with Rome. Incidental points only, connected with these primary truths, became matters of debate. Practically, the conflict turned upon the question of satisfaction. Mediæval theology had dwelt on sin mainly in its aspect of a debt, and on satisfaction consequently as a penal exercise compensating for the claims of the justice of God. The popular view of Penance, and the whole fabric of Indulgences, were built up on these ideas. Our Reformers sought on the contrary to bring out prominently in their stead, the idea of sin, as a pollution, and penance as a remedial, rather than a punitive, work. According to this view satisfaction is simply the pleasing God where He had been displeased, and a reparation of loving service in the stead of past disobedience. To change the prevailing ideas of the effects of sin and the character of repentance, without disparaging good works and personal mortification, was the pressing difficulty to be met. That there was no idea of doing away with works of Penance, or diminishing in the very least degree the sense of their necessity and moral value, is evident. Such passages as the following are sufficient to prove this point. Of "Almsdeeds," e.g., the Homily thus speaks; "Surely as they were faithful to God-ward, and therefore discharged their duty truly, in telling us what was God's will; so of a singular love to us-ward, they laboured not only to inform us, but also to persuade us, that to give alms, and to succour the poor and needy, was a very acceptable thing, and a high sacrifice to God, wherein He greatly delighted, and had a singular pleasure." Again: "And as all these by their mercifulness and tender compassion, which they showed to

the miserable and afflicted members of CHRIST, in the relieving, helping and succouring them with their temporal goods in this life, obtained GOD's favour, and were dear, acceptable and pleasant in His sight; so now they themselves take pleasure in the fruition of GOD, in the pleasant joys of heaven, and are also in GOD's eternal Word set before us, as perfect examples ever before our eyes, both how we shall please GOD in this our mortal life, and also how we may come to live in joy with them in everlasting pleasure and felicity."¹

The Puritans, though on very widely different grounds from the Roman Divines, and from a different point of view, yet founded their system of penitence similarly on the view of sin as a debt, to be liquidated by punishment. As they considered righteousness to be an imputed and consequently an external gift, really inherent only in CHRIST, though communicated as a title of acceptableness to the believer, so they represented forgiveness as the removal of the appointed penalties of sin through our LORD bearing them on the Cross. Pardon, according to their view, did not imply a change of heart, nor depend at all on the work of the Spirit in sanctifying the person, but on a judicial acquittal on the part of GOD, a freedom from guilt not through any act of grace within the soul, but only through trust in the acceptableness of our LORD's sufferings. It is not meant that they intentionally disparaged, or failed to urge as necessary, good works enjoined in the Gospel; but they denied to them any value in the acceptance of a penitent, representing them only as fruits suitable to an accepted state.

To adopt the words of the writer in the "Ecclesiastic," already alluded to; "It will help us to understand the position in which the Anglican Reformers were placed, and the

¹ Homily on Almsdeeds, First Part.

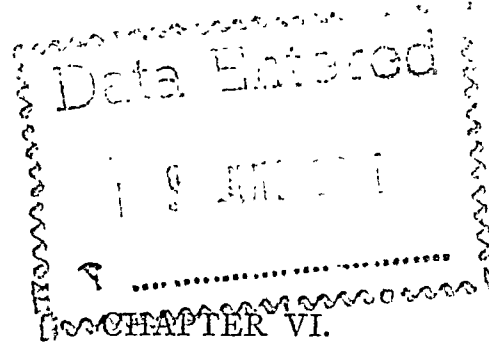
immense difficulties they had to contend with, if we give a sketch of the Puritan teaching on the doctrine of satisfaction. They, with the Romanist, looked on sin chiefly in its aspect as a debt; they eagerly took up the doctrine and elaborated it into a system as exact and minute as that of the schoolmen, only with this difference, that while the latter required the debt to be paid by the sinner himself by penance and good works, the former taught that their debt was paid by the merits and sufferings of CHRIST, and that CHRIST endured all their suffering instead of the sinner, and that the manner of 'appropriating' these merits and sufferings was by faith alone. Accordingly we have curious inquiries and speculations on the extent of CHRIST's sufferings, and how they could suffice for the eternal torments remitted to the elect. Bishop Hopkins, one of the most exact writers of this school, in his treatise on the Two Covenants, thus balances up accounts; 'As for this Eternal Covenant, it is that CHRIST JESUS is related unto GOD as a surety to a creditor.' 'From this covenant of redemption flows the mutual stipulation or agreement between the FATHER and the SON, upon terms and conditions concerning man's salvation; or rather indeed it formally consists in it.' 'Upon these articles and conditions CHRIST accepts the work, and resolves to take upon Him the form of a servant, to be made under the authority of the law, and to bear the curse of it, and the whole load of His FATHER's wrath due unto sin and sinners, and thus the covenant of redemption is from all eternity agreed and perfected between the FATHER and JESUS CHRIST.' 'But in this redemption by CHRIST, justice hath its full glory, in that GOD takes vengeance on the sin to the very uttermost, and yet mercy is likewise glorified to the full; for the sinner is, without his own sufferings, pardoned, accepted, and saved. That none but CHRIST could do this is evident, because no mere

creature could bear an infinite punishment, so as to eluctate and finish it, and no finite punishment could satisfy an infinite justice ; he must be man that satisfies, else satisfaction would not be made in the same nature that sinned ; He must be GOD likewise, else human nature could not be supported from sinking under the infinite load of Divine wrath.' From whence it follows, that justification 'flows from the righteousness of CHRIST's satisfaction imputed to us. For guilt is nothing else but our obligation to punishment ; and therefore pardon, being the removal of guilt, must needs remove our obligation to punishment. But no man can be justly obliged to that punishment, which he hath already satisfactorily undergone, and therefore CHRIST having satisfactorily undergone the whole punishment that was due to us, and God graciously accounting His satisfaction as ours, it follows, that we lie under no obligation to punishment.' Practically, the doctrine of the Romanist and the Puritan on the Treasury of merit was the same ; it differed in the application ; the former required certain penances, the latter the far easier feeling of assurance."¹

The same writer attributes to the pressure of difficulties involved in this controversy, the fact that the Reformers "made no direct provision for the administration of the Sacrament of Penance, and for a course of discipline connected with it." There can be no question but that our Reformers, through the force of conflicting interests in the great strife of religious parties during that revolutionary period, were constrained to limit themselves to the enunciation of principles and general laws, content to leave till more settled times the elaboration of detailed rules and the formation of a practical system. To expect that a code of canons in so intricate a matter as the discipline of repent-

¹ "Ecclesiastic," Nov. 1865, pp. 489, 90.

ance could have been framed during the crisis of the Reformation, would prove a manifest incapacity of appreciating the condition of society at the time. What took place in regard to the Statute Law of the Church is a parallel case precisely in point. Provisional enactments were passed repealing whatever statute or canon was at variance with principles authoritatively affirmed at the Reformation, but leaving in force all else contained in the ancient Law, till a new code adapted to the altered condition of the Church should be framed. Nothing however has been done up to this day in fulfilment of this intention. In a similar way the general principles determining the differences between us and the Church of Rome on the doctrine of Penitence, were laid down, but these alone remain to bear witness to the designs of our Reformers. To complain of defect in details, still more to deny the force of such principles, because not reduced to a practical system, is to charge upon our Reformers the results of the troubled times in which their work was to be done, and of the long series of struggles which subsequently threatened its existence. Our resource in practically carrying out the reformed penitential discipline, is similar to that which is acted on in regard to the Church's Canon Law, viz., to apply ancient precedents as our guide, except so far as they are repealed by positive statements determining the mind of the Church. The truth of a system depends on its principles, not on the mode of carrying them out in practice.



THE EXHORTATION OF THE EUCHARISTIC OFFICE.

TO fix the conditions of Communion, was the question of greatest practical moment to be determined at the time of the Reformation in England. For upwards of 300 years, from 1215 to 1547,¹ there was no approach to the Blessed Sacrament without habitual Confession. This rule was repealed in England in the first year of Edward VI. But it was not intended that confessions should therefore cease. The contrary is clearly implied in the Royal Injunctions issued in the course of the same year. It is therein enjoined; "They (the clergy) shall in confessions every Lent examine every person that cometh to confession to them, whether they can recite the articles of their faith, the Pater Noster and the Ten Commandments in English; and hear them say the same particularly; wherein if they be not perfect, they shall declare them, that every Christian person ought to know the said things, before they should receive the Blessed Sacrament of the altar."² Confession therefore was intended to be continued as a general practice.

The Order of Communion appeared in 1548, and it contained an invitation to Confession, which was preserved in the first Prayer Book published in the year following. No

¹ The Six Articles were repealed in 1547.

² Cardwell's Documentary Annals, "Injunctions by King Edward VI." Vol. i. p. 10.

necessity existed for mentioning the subject of Confession in the new Eucharistic Office. The ancient Liturgy, from which it was taken, contained no allusion to it. If the Reformers had designed to set aside Confession, they could most readily have effected their object by passing it over in silence. There would have been no omission, where there was no precedent for its introduction. The express allusion to it in connection with the Holy Communion can hardly be explained, except on the supposition of a desire to secure its continuance, though under an altered rule.

The passage relating to Confession stood thus in the first Prayer Book : " If there be any of you whose conscience is troubled and grieved in anything, lacking comfort or counsel, let him come to me or to some other discreet and learned priest taught in the law of GOD, and confess and open his sin and grief secretly, that he may receive such ghostly counsel, advice, and comfort, that his conscience may be relieved, and that of us, (as of the ministers of GOD and of the Church,) he may receive comfort and absolution, to the satisfaction of his mind, and avoiding of all scruple and doubtfulness : requiring such as shall be satisfied with a general confession not to be offended with them that do use to their further satisfying the auricular and secret confession to the priest ; nor those also which think needful or convenient, for the quietness of their own consciences, particularly to open their sins to the priest, to be offended with them that are satisfied with their humble confession to GOD, and the general confession to the Church ; but in all things to follow and keep the rule of charity, and every man to be satisfied with his own conscience, not judging other men's minds or consciences ; whereas he hath no warrant of GOD's word to the same."

Two important principles were here asserted. (1.) Confession was declared to be no longer obligatory on the con-

sciences of all alike, but dependent on the special needs of individual souls. (2.) Permission was given to confess to any priest, not necessarily, as before, to the priest of the parish.¹

Probably a third distinction at variance with mediæval practice was intended, viz., the restricting the objects of

¹ The Roman rule binds every one to confess to his own parish Priest, and decrees that an absolution given by any other is ordinarily void. The Council of Trent grounds this rule on the principle of Priests exercising a strictly judicial function. If they are judges armed with authority within a particular sphere, those who are within their cure are subject to them, and thus bound to their ministry. "Quoniam igitur natura et ratio judicii illud exposcit, ut sententia in subditos duntaxat feratur, persuasum semper in Ecclesia Dei fuit, et verissimum esse Synodus hæc confirmat, nullius momenti absolutionem eam esse debere, quam sacerdos in eum profert in quem ordinariam aut subdelegatam non habet jurisdictionem." That this is but a law of discipline, depending on Church rule, not a principle inherent in the institution, is clear from this, that in case of mortal sickness any Priest is permitted to receive the confession and absolve, and even remit sentences of excommunication imposed by the Bishop. "Verumtamen piè admodum, ne hac ipsa occasione aliquis pereat, in eadem ecclesia Dei custoditum semper fuit, ut nulla sit reservatio in articulo mortis: atque ideo omnes sacerdotes quoslibet pœnitentes a quibusvis peccatis et censuris absolvere possunt." Sess. xiv. cap. vii., de casuum reservatione.

It is a disciplinary law which the Church has power to regulate at discretion. Our rule "let him come to me or to some other," &c., is framed on the idea that Confession is of so private and confidential a character, that it is fair and reasonable to allow to every one liberty as to the choice of his Confessor. One can readily perceive a propriety in the different use of the Roman and English Communions, arising from their different principles. Confession in the one case being an absolute rule, it necessarily involves an obligation in every one towards his immediate spiritual superior; in our own case being discretionary, it would naturally on this principle admit a greater freedom. See Dr. Pusey's Letter to Mr. Richards (pp. 19, 33,) where the question is fully argued, and our rule elaborately defended.

Confession to absolution and spiritual counsel, no mention being made of satisfaction, from the desire of removing the idea of a compensation for the temporal penalties of sin, which had become identified with the term, and formed so material a part of the mediæval system of Penance.

The closing paragraph, most characteristic of the temper of the English Reformation in its earlier stage, before foreign divines entered in to disturb its native and legitimate tendencies, conveys a salutary warning to those who confess, not to disparage those who struggle on, as they suppose more healthfully, without it; and on the other hand to those who reject confession, not to regard those who use it, as on that account worse or weaker than themselves; but that each should esteem the other in the grace of charity, they who confess, confessing to the LORD, and giving God thanks, and they who confess not, confessing not to the LORD, and giving God thanks. It is sometimes urged that the omission of this paragraph argues some change as to the use of confession. But this is not the part of the Exhortation on which advice as to the use of confession rests. It is simply a warning as to preserving mutual charity, supposing confession is, or is not, used. How much contention would have been spared, if this paragraph had been suffered to remain! How far gentler and more forbearing a spirit would have been thus infused into the discussions which of late years have been rife among us!

The entire passage underwent material alterations in the second Prayer Book of the same reign. The object of the leading Divines of our Communion at the time, was to win over the foreign Protestants, and those who held with them in England, some, no doubt, from sympathy with their views, but others manifestly influenced by the charitable

hope of preventing a wider separation, and possibly, by avoiding controverted expressions, smoothing the way for their adoption of higher Church views. The wording of the passage, when altered, became in consequence less full and definite, though its original principles are still preserved. That the change of language implied no change of doctrine, is asserted by the revisers themselves in a document of so public and grave a character as to preclude the idea of haste or exaggeration. The "Act for the uniformity of services" (1552) while authorizing the second Prayer Book, asserts the former book to be "agreeable to the word of God and the primitive Church;" and that "doubts in the use and exercise thereof" had arisen "rather from the curiosity of the ministers and mistakers, than of any other worthy cause."¹

From this declaration it follows that the first Prayer Book embodies the true principles of the English Reformation, and consequently that we are justified in referring to it for the authoritative explanation of any doubtful passages occurring in the second Book. The passage of the Exhortation in question assumed in the second Book the following shape. The new or altered expressions, which are of any importance, are italicised for the sake of easier reference.

"Because it is requisite that no man should come to the Holy Communion but with a full trust in God's mercy and with a quiet conscience, therefore if there be any of you which by the means aforesaid, cannot quiet his own conscience, but requireth further comfort or counsel; then let him come to me or some other discreet and learned minister of God's word, and *open his grief*, that he may receive such ghostly counsell, advice, and comfort, as his conscience may

¹ Stat. 5 & 6 Edw. VI., c. i. Hardwick's Reformation, pp. 199, 220, quoted by Procter, Book of Common Prayer, p. 32. The Act is given in extenso by Bulley, p. 284.

be relieved, and that *by the ministry of God's word* he may receive comfort and *the benefit of absolution*, to the quieting of his conscience, and the avoiding of all scruple and doubtfulness."

The main difference between the first and the second Book are, (1) "grief" instead of "sin and grief;" (2) "open" instead of "confess and open secretly;" (3) "by the ministry of God's holy word," instead of "of us (as of the ministers of God and of the Church);" (4) "benefit of absolution" instead of "absolution;" (5) "auricular and secret confession" omitted, as well as (6) the closing paragraph, "requiring such as shall be satisfied," &c.

The solemn testimony of the revisers themselves, already referred to, requires us to interpret the altered terms in the sense of the words for which they were substituted. But even without this authority determining their interpretation, there is no change or omission which could warrant the supposition of change of doctrine. Though "sin and grief" are fuller than "grief" alone, yet the grief intended is manifestly such as burdens the conscience, which can be nothing else than sin. "Grief" implies the effect of the sin on the soul, as well as the sin which causes it.¹ "Open"

¹ Grief from *gravis* (grave peccatum) corresponds with the "weighty matter" of the rubric in the "Visitation of the Sick." See Mr. Newland's "Confession as it is in the Church of England." Mr. Newland argues from this expression that the confession intended, is limited to the special burden weighing on the conscience. It will hereafter be shown that neither is confession thus limited by the Church of England, nor indeed from its very nature can it be. The question is not entered upon in the text, the only object here being to prove that the expressions used respectively in the first and second Prayer Book are identical in principle. "Sin and grief" in the first, and "grief" in the second book, are alike in the singular number, and if the former book did not intend to confine confession to any one special burden on the conscience, neither did the latter.

is a more concise expression than "confess and open," but it is the stronger term of the two, as involving an unreserved confession. To "cover a transgression," the direct contrary to "open," is the Scriptural phrase for withholding a confession. The omission of the terms, "secret," "auricular," is a loss of definiteness, but it has been shown in tracing the history of Confession, that in very early days it became a secret act, and the long established custom at the time when these words were used, would have conveyed to all who heard them the idea of privacy as necessarily involved in that of Confession, no confession but of a private character being then known.

(4.) "Benefit of absolution," instead of "absolution" simply, is the adoption of an older phrase, and rather connects the language of the revised exhortation more closely than before with the traditionary expressions of the Church. The phrase occurs, e.g., in the canons of the Council of Narbonne, A.D. 1374, and again in those of the Council of Tarragona, A.D. 1329.¹ In the reign of Mary Bonner used the same phrase in one of his Visitation articles, inquiring "whether any person have refused to be confessed, and receive at the priest's hands the benefit of absolution according to the laudable custom of this realm."²

(3.) The phrase, "by the ministry of God's word," needs a fuller consideration. It is indeed often quoted to prove, that Absolution is here represented as merely an exposition or application to individuals of the promises of Holy Scripture. If this be indeed the true interpretation, the language of the Prayer Book no longer admits of argument, at least with any consistent results. For the term Absolution, has for ages obtained a definite dogmatic meaning in Chris-

¹ Quoted by Dr. Pusey in his Letter to Mr. Richards, "The Church of England leaves her children free."—Pp. 41, 42.

² Cardwell's Documentary Annals. Vol. i. p. 130.

tianity, as an ordinance, or act of ministry. It was so understood at the time when the second Prayer Book came into use. The Prayer Book itself always represents it as an exercise of authority confined to the Priesthood, and gives the form in which it is to be administered. A Deacon is expressly precluded from administering Absolution, though authorised to preach, and therefore able to expound the Scriptures so as to apply its promises of forgiveness. The Homilies speak of it, as will afterwards be shown, as a Sacrament. In primitive times it was, as already proved, a clearly defined ministry, in constant use, and held to be of the greatest moment; and the English Reformation proceeded on the assumption of moulding itself according to ancient custom. If, therefore, by the insertion of the phrase in question, the Reformers meant to introduce a new theory of their own, and, while retaining the ancient term, affix to it a new meaning, such a course was not merely in direct contradiction to their avowed intentions, but would have introduced hopeless confusion into theological language.

But there is no difficulty in explaining the expression consistently with the declaration, already quoted, which affirmed an identity of doctrine in the two Prayer Books. The expression, probably, was adopted, because while calculated to conciliate the foreign Reformers, it commended itself at the same time, as both scriptural and patristic. It has been already shown, that in the foreign reformed Confessions of Faith, special prominence was given to the Word of God in connection with the ministry of Absolution,—the Lutherans explaining the effects of this ministry by the power of God's Word in producing faith, the Calvinists making it consist altogether in the declaration of the promises of forgiveness revealed in the Gospel.

The expression under consideration is also consistent with

a sacramental view of the ministry, and is used under this idea both in Scripture and by the Fathers. S. Paul, e.g., speaks of CHRIST in holy Baptism "cleansing" the Church "with the washing of water by the Word ;"¹ S. Peter again, of our "being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the Word of GOD."² In both cases the grace of the sacrament is referred, not to the act of the minister, but to the Word used in his ministry. In like manner our LORD ascribes the last Judgment not to His own act, but to His Word : "The Word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day."³ S. Ambrose preserves this same language ; "Sins are remitted through the Word of GOD, of which the Levite is the interpreter and a sort of executor. They are remitted also through the office of the Priest, and the sacred ministry."⁴ Again S. Augustine, commenting on our LORD's saying, "Now are ye clean through the Word which I have spoken unto you," adds, "Why saith He not, Ye are clean through the Baptism wherewith ye have been baptized? saving that in water also the Word cleanseth. Take away the Word, and what is the water, but water? The Word is added to the element, and it becomes a Sacrament, which itself also is a sort of visible word."⁵

Hooker evidently understood the phrase in our Office in this sense, regarding "the Word" as a part or instrument of the ministerial act in conveying the grace of Absolution, not as a substitute for it. "They" (i.e., they who seek relief of the Priest according to his invitation) "are to rest with minds encouraged and persuaded concerning the for-

¹ Ephes. v. 26.

² 1 S. Pet. i. 23.

³ S. John xii. 48.

⁴ De Cain et Abel. l. ii. c. iv. n. 15.

⁵ In Joh. Tract. 80, § 3. This and the preceding passage of S. Ambrose are quoted by Dr. Pusey in his second sermon, "Entire Absolution of the Penitent," note to p. 9.

givenness of all their sins, as out of CHRIST's own word and power by the ministry of the keys."¹

The passage in the Exhortation, when thus understood, comprehensively expresses the several parts of the ministry, —1. the agent, a Priest, "let him come to me, or some other;"² 2. the instrument of his ministry, "God's holy Word," 3. the blessing bestowed, "counsel, comfort, and the benefit of absolution;" and 4. the results, "the quieting of his conscience and avoiding of all scruple and doubtfulness."

It is further urged, that the Absolution spoken of in the Exhortation is, not the private, but the public act of this ministry, as used in the daily Prayers and the Eucharistic Office. This opinion is grounded on the fact, that no form of private Absolution is appointed, except for the case of sickness; and this fact is considered all the stronger, because in the Office for the Visitation of the Sick in the first Prayer Book there was a rubric directing that the form there appointed should be used also "in all private Confessions," and this rubric disappears from the second Book. This studied omission of the rubric, it is affirmed, proves the Church's intention to discontinue the use of private absolutions, except in sickness, more culated to than if the original order had never been itself at the

It has been argued the following reasons apply. (1.) Confessions of penitence but that private Absolution was in the Word of GOD in the passage in the Exhortation, as it stood in the Exhortation,—the Luther

by the power of (c. iv. 14, vol. iii. p. 61, Keble's Edit. can here be intended from the wording of the ministers making it conformable to the Exhortation: "I purpose, through GOD's assistance, to forgive sins." A Priest alone can read it, as a Priest alone

The expression und

first Prayer Book ; and the framers of the second Book, as already shown, expressly disclaim any change of doctrine. But the doctrine of Absolution is a main feature of Christianity, and the relative value of special and general absolutions is, as will hereafter be proved, a material part of the doctrine. (2.) The clergy living at the time when the second Prayer Book was introduced, and therefore reading the Exhortation both in its original and altered forms, must have used the same words (for the words suggesting Absolution were not changed) in two different senses, and yet no explanation was given to indicate such an important alteration. Persons coming to them for Confession on the terms of the first Prayer Book, knew that they might receive special private Absolution. The very same invitation was given in the second Prayer Book ; and is it conceivable that persons coming as before, were intended to find the private ministry refused, and a different ministry employed ? (3.) The offer to come to God's minister to "open their grief," is addressed to Churchgoers, i.e., persons in the habit of receiving general absolutions, but yet unable by this means to obtain peace of conscience. They seek the private ministry, because the public service has failed to meet their need. To bid such persons go back, and rest satisfied in what they have already found to be inadequate, would be to acknowledge that the Church had no proper means of supplying their special want. Yet the words of the invitation, when simply received,—“let him come to me or to some other . . . that he may receive the benefit of absolution,”—certainly would seem to hold out to such persons the promise of some further special form of the ministry of Absolution, not before, or otherwise, within their reach. (4.) The supposed change would be a departure from primitive practice, and the establishment of a new form of the ministry of reconciliation. For although, according to pri-

mitive rule, after a confession made in private the penitent might receive absolution in public, yet the absolution was always in such case given by individual application with imposition of hands. A special Confession of sins, when special Absolution was sought, involved, according to all ancient practice, a personal and individual application of the power of the keys.

(5.) The Church of Ireland is united with the Church of England, because of their common faith, and sameness of principle in their common reformation. They have the same Prayer Book and a common ritual.¹ Now among the Irish Canons drawn up by Bramhall, Usher being Primate, A.D. 1634, and re-enacted in 1701, when Marsh was Primate, there is one referring to the Exhortation in question, and enacted with the view of enforcing, and reducing to practice, the invitation to Confession which it contains. This canon manifestly implies, that the special private ministry of Absolution is understood to be intended. It is as follows: "Canon XIX. Warning to be given beforehand for the Communion. Whereas, every lay person is bound to receive the Holy Communion thrice every year, and many notwithstanding do not receive that Sacrament once in a year: we do require every minister to give warning to his parishioners, publicly in the church at Morning Prayer, the Sunday before every time of his administering the Holy Sacrament, for the better preparation of themselves; which said warning we enjoin the said parishioners to accept and obey under the penalty and danger of the law. And the minister of every parish, and in cathedral and collegiate churches some principal minister of the church, shall the afternoon before the administration give warning, by the tolling of the bell or otherwise, to the intent that if any have any scruple of conscience, or desire *the*

¹ See Palmer's History of the Church, vol. i. sec. 550, 1.

becomes, strictly speaking, sacramental. Supposing Absolution to be intended under this expression, it is classed in this passage in the same category with "Orders" and "Confirmation," and therefore considered of similar importance and virtue.

The reference to S. Augustine as an authority for the view taken by the Homilist, proves that the above statements are intended to be in harmony with his, and therefore with Catholic teaching. To rest on such testimony for the pre-eminent distinctiveness of Baptism and the Lord's Supper, implies that the same authority is to determine the comparative value of the other means of grace. And it is clear that S. Augustine taught the sacramental virtue of Absolution.¹ The Homily therefore could not deny this belief, without denying the authority, on which the main substance of its doctrinal statement is based.

It appears then that, according to the judgment of the Homily, Absolution is not to be counted a sacrament in the "exact signification" of the term, because (1) its visible

¹ "Implicatus igitur tam mortiferorum vinculis peccatorum detrectat, aut differt, aut dubitat confugere ad ipsas claves Ecclesiæ, quibus solvatur in terra, ut sit solutus in cœlo? Judicet ergo seipsum homo; et cum ipse in se protulerit severissimæ medicinæ, sed tamen medicinæ, sententiam, veniat ad antistites, per quos illi in Ecclesia claves ministrantur." S. Aug. tom. viii., Serm. cccli. De Pœnit. § 9.

"Remissio peccatorum solutio est. Quid enim prodesset Lazaro, quia processit de monumento, nisi diceretur, Solvite eum, et sinite abire Cum audis hominem confitendo proferre conscientiam, jam de sepulcro eductus est, sed nondum solutus est. Quando solvitur? A quibus solvitur? *Quæ solveritis*, inquit, *in terra, erunt soluta et in cœlo*. Merito per Ecclesiam dari solutio peccatorum potest; suscitari autem ipse mortuus nonnisi intus clamante Domino potest; hæc enim Deus interius agit." Tom. vi. in Ps. cl. Serm. ii. § 3.

It is anticipating the subject of the following chapter, to touch on the question of the rubric alluded to in the "Visitation of the Sick" of the first Prayer Book, but as the objection urged against the use of private Absolution in preparation for Holy Communion rests mainly on the removal from that rubric of the clause which refers to Confessions made at other times beside sickness, it is impossible to settle the point now under consideration, without entering into the question.

The point to be determined is, with what view that clause of the rubric was omitted? If the purpose was to prevent special private Absolution being given, as before, after Confession, in preparation for Communion, thus modifying the meaning of one formulary of the Church by a sidelong move in the construction of another, it would be an instance of subtle policy of which there is no other instance in the Prayer Book. It is at once fairer to the character of our Reformers, and more natural, to look for the explanation of the change in the "Visitation" service itself, rather than in another disconnected part of the Prayer Book. Now it is observable, that at the very time when the clause in question was omitted, another important change was made in the same rubric. That rubric, preceding the Absolution, stood thus in the first Prayer Book: "After which confession the Priest shall absolve him after this form." In the second Prayer Book "after this form" was altered into "after this sort." This change, we can scarcely doubt, was made in order to meet the objections raised against the compulsory use of this particular form of Absolution. The indicative form was unpopular, because supposed to imply too great authority in the Priest. Our Reformers upheld the form itself as a true expression of the Church's doctrine, but at the same time they were not unwilling to meet the scruples of objectors by allowing a liberty in its use, such as existed in primitive times.

Marshall gives several forms of special absolution,¹ indifferently used in the early Church, as proving the discretionary power then exercised by the Priest. Following this precedent our Reformers, while upholding the standard form, as most fully expressive of the authority and virtue of the ministry, yet allowed the Priest to exercise a similar discretion. This principle was acted on in the case of the Exhortations in the same Office, liberty being given to substitute in the place of the form appointed any other which the Priest might consider more appropriate to the special case. On the same principle "this form" was changed to "this sort." But when this change was made, the rubric could no longer stand as before in that other respect, for in such case this particular "form" would have been enjoined without power of choice in all other private absolutions, freedom to vary it being given only in the case of sickness. By omitting the restricting clause a similar discretion was given in both cases. For the sick a form of absolution was provided, the minister being free to choose another form of a like "sort," if he prefer it. In the preparation for Communion the Priest is enjoined to give the "benefit of absolution," but he is left free to select a form. It is surely more consistent with the mind of our Reformation, to suppose such a liberty given in the choice of a form, than that the mere absence of a form should be construed into the repeal of an express order; for Absolution was ordered to be given, though no form was prescribed. Nor can it be otherwise shown, that the Reformers adhered in this case to primitive Catholic rule. For it would have been no greater deviation from primitive usage, to deny special Absolution in case of sickness, than to deny it in preparation for Communion, the use of special Absolution

¹ See Marshall's Penitential Discipline, Appendix, No. iv. to end.

embodied in this Commission, accompanied only with a general pastoral charge. Equally destitute of all reference to the remission of sins is the "prayer or blessing" approved by the Assembly at Westminster in 1645.¹

It has been observed, as "a significant thing," that in the requisitions which were more than once presented to Convocation during Queen Mary's reign, to restore doctrine and discipline as they had been before King Edward's time, Confession was scarcely alluded to, as though there was no ground for desiring change in this respect in the Church of England's rule, even in the estimation of Roman Catholics. The observation is the more instructive, as coming from one who, shortly after his book was written, left us to join the Church of Rome. "The only notice," Mr. Maskell says, "that I remember, is to the effect that Confession be again made, as it had been, obligatory. Much less is there complaint made, that people had been of late years taught, that the blessings and grace of (special?) sacerdotal absolution were to be obtained after the public repetition of general confessions. The order to confess once a year was again insisted on, and this was all."²

¹ Confession of Faith, p. 538, Edinb., 1756.

² Maskell's "Doctrine of Absolution," pp. 130, 131. Mr. Shaw, in his Pamphlet, already alluded to, "Reply to certain Strictures" (p. 33, note 1) observes that, in the "Articuli de Doctrina" of the Convocation of 1557 (Card. Synod², 453) sermons are recommended to be preached "de Eucharistia, de Poenitentia, de Confessione Auriculari, et de reliquis Sacramentis, quæ heretici nostri temporis maximè impugnauerunt." Mr. Shaw thus comments on this passage: "It will not be disputed that the other points in this list are precisely those on which the principles of the two churches differed. The same, therefore, is to be observed of Auricular Confession." But it is evident that the object of these injunctions was to give teaching of a special Roman kind on these points of doctrine, not that they had been altogether ignored or

order of the sentences. The result will be best appreciated by quoting the paragraph as it stood in the second Prayer Book, bracketing the words omitted in the last revision, and italicising those of which the position was then changed. It will stand thus; "Let him come to me or some other discreet and learned minister of GOD's Word, and open his grief, that [he may receive such ghostly counsel, advice, and comfort, as his conscience may be relieved, and that] by the ministry of GOD's holy Word, he may receive [comfort and] the benefit of absolution, *together with ghostly counsel and advice*, to the quieting of his conscience and avoiding of all scruple and doubtfulness." By this change, "ghostly comfort and advice," which had previously occupied the most prominent position, and were thus set forth as the primary objects of confession, now sank into a subordinate place, and "the benefit of absolution," which had been last, became first. The term "comfort," moreover was omitted, the effect of which was still further to fix attention more pointedly on the Absolution itself, as the ground of comfort, rather than on the comfort which was its result. The significance of these changes surely proves that the mere curtailing a lengthy sentence could not have been the object in view.

At the same time a material alteration was made in the directions for the use of the two Exhortations. The first Prayer Book contained an Exhortation, with invitation to confession, which was ordered to be read only in case "the people be negligent to come to the Communion." In the second Bóok an additional Exhortation was inserted, and this contained no allusion whatever to Confession or Absolution. Moreover this new Exhortation was placed first in order, with the following rubric prefixed; "Then shall follow this Exhortation at certain times, when the Curate shall see the people negligent to come to the Holy Communion." The original Exhortation was at the same time

placed second, the following rubric being prefixed to it; "And some time shall be said this also, at the discretion of the Curate."

In consequence of this change the Exhortation inviting to Confession, was read only as an occasional and discretionary substitute, the new form appointed for ordinary use, when the people were negligent, containing no mention of it. If the parish Priest desired to discourage Confession, the Exhortation recommending it might never be read at all.

But at the revision of 1661 the order of these two Exhortations was reversed, the one containing the invitation to Confession being placed first, and a new rubric inserted, determining its constant use. "When the Minister giveth warning for the celebration of the Holy Communion (which he shall always do upon the Sunday or some holyday immediately preceding,) after the sermon or homily ended, he shall read this Exhortation following." The other Exhortation sank into the second place, and was to be read only "in case he (the Priest) shall see the people negligent to come to the Holy Communion." Thus the invitation to Confession ordinarily became obligatory, and was to be read to the people in constant connection with the notice to prepare themselves for Holy Communion.

An argument against Confession has been founded on the absence of all allusion to it in the second Exhortation. It is urged that inasmuch as this Exhortation was ordered to be read to meet the special need of very careless persons, if Confession were the great remedy for sin, the persons addressed would be just those on whom it would be most expedient to enforce it.¹ The argument no doubt is plausible, and, if the two Exhortations had been framed at the same time, and under similar influences, it would be entitled to

¹ Both Mr. Shaw and the writer of the article in the "Quarterly Review" urge this argument. It is material to remark, that neither by

considerable weight. But we must not lose sight of the fact that the changes which resulted in the second Prayer Book, in which this Exhortation first occurs, were brought about by an extreme section of Reformers,—by those desirous of discouraging Confession, and against whose influence, once dominant, but under more favourable circumstances overruled, the more Catholic improvements already alluded to were made, and the losses so greatly deplored were at least partially recovered, in 1661. The omission, therefore, of all allusion to Confession in this second Exhortation, is merely the token of a temporary prevalence of a power adverse to the real mind of the Church.

These repeated changes, marking so great care in the choice and arrangement of the words employed, moreover supply an answer to the view held by many, that the language of the invitation is too vague and general to express the idea of formal Confession, and that some confidential mode of opening the heart different from what is technically understood by that term, is intended.

The extreme anxiety evidently felt in weighing and selecting the expressions used to describe the act, seems not to accord with this view. Why use any of the old technical expressions, if the technical act was not meant? Why scrupulously preserve so much of the accustomed language, if not intended to form the link between the old and the new systems, if on the contrary a complete distinction was to be established between the two? At first the very same persons who had been habituated to the old form, were to be reconciled to the new. How misleading the retention of the ancient use to express the supposed substitute!

Mr. Shaw, nor by the writer in the “Quarterly,” is any notice taken of the progressive changes in our Offices, which have been urged in the text as telling so greatly in favour of the practice of Confession.

What confusion must have arisen from the collision of such different views couched under the same terms !

Moreover the necessity of practical arrangements for carrying out the altered system leads to the same conclusion as to the continuity of use, though in some degree changed. It was not possible, if Confession was to be practised, but that some formal rules must be laid down, if not by the Church, yet by individual Priests. It is assumed that all the ancient rules were not to be followed ; the changes already spoken of sufficed of themselves to repeal all rules resting for their force on the forbidden principles. But other rules remained untouched by these changes, and they would naturally, unless expressly forbidden, of which there is no record, continue on in use, and experience would gradually accumulate other rules to meet the cases of need arising in reference to points affected by such changes. Any system of dealing with the inner life, and the necessities of souls, of such a solemn character as is supposed, must needs grow into a settled form ; and it is morally certain that recourse would be had to ancient experience, as the most valuable source of information, even if habit had not predisposed to such a course those who had first to administer the altered system, and set the first traditions of the reformed mode of spiritual discipline. The care shown in the revisions of the passages of the Prayer Book bearing on the subject, clearly leads to the supposition that similar care was bestowed on the actual ministration of the ordinance. The invitation at least embraced vast numbers ; with great varieties of spiritual need, to be met by men already trained to deal with such wants. We cannot but suppose that they would apply their experience and past training to formalize, under the altered circumstances, ministrings which had always been a chief part of their service.¹

¹ Mr. Shaw has thoughtfully expressed his view of the meaning of

The effect of the successive revisions here detailed, has been to reaffirm repeatedly the principle of Confession, the invitation always being in the Office, whether, or not, put forward prominently, while the last and final changes stamped it with even greater definiteness than before. The invitation, when at first introduced, was, be it well observed, an entirely voluntary insertion on the part of the framers of the Office. Their successors not only preserved it, but invested it with increased significance. It now abides as an enduring testimony to a long-established truth, confirmed by repeated acts of those who had chief authority within the Church. "They are," as it has been eloquently said, "living words ; they are an actual reality ; they are renewed whenever they are pronounced ; they speak whenever they are read ; they have spoken to thousands and tens of thousands of broken, anxious, burdened hearts ; they are the voice of the Church of England, and of God through her, speaking to people's consciences, and they are heard and understood."¹

the passage in question, and probably it is one that would generally approve itself to religious minds opposed to the larger and more definite use advocated in this treatise. He supposes "that the invitation to come to the minister is meant to suggest what may be a special aid to certain dejected souls, rather than to provide an ordinary means of grace or remedy for sinners in general : " "that not so much a complete confession of sins as an opening of the grief that specially weighs on a tender conscience is intended : " or again, "an occasional unburdening of those sins which specially weigh on the conscience in accordance with the necessities of the particular case, and not under technical rules."—"A Reply to certain Strictures," pp. 11, 21.

In reference to the idea of special confession as distinct from the general confession of all sins, or sins of the life, see remarks in the next chapter, on the confession contemplated in the case of the sick.

¹ Dr. Pusey's Letter to Mr. Richards, page 120.

NOTE.

The successive changes in the concluding portion of the Exhortation, will be more clearly seen when shown in parallel columns. The rubric, determining the use of the Exhortation, is given in italics. The passages which give direction as to the use of and benefit of Confession are also italicised, that the differences made in the different Books may be more readily seen, as they stand contrasted one with another.

*First Prayer Book of
Edward VI.*

If upon the Sunday or holy day the people be negligent to come to the Communion, then shall the Priest earnestly exhort his parishioners to dispose themselves to the receiving of the Holy Communion more diligently, saying these or like words unto them:—

. . . And if there be any of you (1) *whose conscience is troubled and grieved in anything, lacking comfort or counsel, (2) let him come to me, or to some other discreet and learned priest, taught in the law of GOD, and (3) confess and open his sin and grief secretly, that he may receive such ghostly counsel, advice, and comfort, that his con-*

*Second Book of Ed-
ward VI.*

And some time shall be said this also, at the discretion of the Curate:—

. . . And because it is requisite that no man should come to the Holy Communion but with a full trust in GOD's mercy, and with a quiet conscience; therefore if there be any of you which by the means aforesaid (1) *cannot quiet his own conscience*, but requireth further comfort or counsel; then (2) *let him come to me, or some other discreet and learned minister of God's word, and (3) open his grief*, that he may receive such ghostly counsel, advice, and comfort, as his conscience may be relieved, and that

*The Revision of
1661.*

When the Minister giveth warning for the celebration of the Holy Communion (which he shall always do upon the Sunday or some holy day immediately preceding,) after the sermon or homily ended, he shall read this Exhortation following:—

. . . And because it is requisite, that no man should come to the Holy Communion, but with a full trust in GOD's mercy, and with a quiet conscience; therefore if there be any of you, who by this means (1) *cannot quiet his own conscience herein*, but requireth further comfort or counsel, (2) *let him come to me, or to some other discreet and learned Minister of*

science may be relieved, and (4) *that of us (as of the ministers of God and of the Church) he may receive comfort and absolution, (5) to the satisfaction of his mind, and avoiding of all scruple and doubtfulness*; requiring such as shall be satisfied with a general confession, not to be offended with them that do use to their further satisfying the auricular and secret confession to the priest; nor those also which think needful or convenient, for the quietness of their own consciences, particularly to open their sins to the priest, to be offended with them that are satisfied with their humble confession to God, and the 'general confession to the Church; but in all things to follow and keep the rule of charity; and every man to be satisfied with his own conscience, not judging other men's minds or consciences; whereas he hath no warrant of God's word to the same.

(4) *by the ministry of God's word he may receive comfort, and the benefit of absolution, (5) to the quieting of his conscience, and avoiding of all scruple and doubtfulness.*

God's word, and (3) *open his grief; that (4) by the ministry of God's holy word he may receive the benefit of absolution, together with ghostly counsel and advice, (5) to the quieting of his conscience, and avoiding of all scruple and doubtfulness.*

CHAPTER VII.

OFFICE FOR THE VISITATION OF THE SICK.

THIS Office is taken, with some material alterations, from the original Latin form, which, as Mr. Palmer has proved, may in its substance "be traced to the primitive ages;"¹ and the resemblances, as well as the differences, in the two Offices are striking and instructive.

In the Latin Office the Priest is directed to examine the sick person, especially in reference to faith, charity, and restitution. After which he thus addresses him; "Dear brother, if thou desirest to attain to the vision of GOD, it is necessary above all things to be clean in heart, and pure in conscience, for CHRIST saith in the Gospel, 'Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see GOD.' If therefore thou desirest to have a clean heart and whole conscience, confess all thy sins."

In the English Office, as originally constructed in the first Prayer Book, the Priest was directed to institute the same inquiry as to faith, charity, restitution, &c. Then followed this rubric: "Here shall the sick person make a special confession, if he feel his conscience troubled with any weighty matter."

The Offices differed in two respects. The Latin represented Confession as absolutely necessary to purity of heart; the English required it only if the conscience were

¹ Palmer's Orig. Liturg., vol. ii. cap. vii. p. 220.

“troubled,” &c. Again, the Latin Office expressly required “all” (*universa*) sins to be confessed, leaving no discretion to the priest or the penitent. The English simply directed a “special confession” to be made. This change of terms was probably intended to counteract the prevailing idea, already noticed, of the necessity of the “numbering,” or exact enumeration, of sins, not so much for the purpose of unburdening the conscience, or exercising a deeper repentance, but in order to form the subject matter of satisfaction.

A further change was made in a matter affecting discipline. The Latin Office, in a Rubric following the Absolution, ordered that if a penitent were in danger of death, the Priest might absolve him, even though his sins were among reserved cases, on condition that, if he recovered, he should confess them again to the person authorised to deal with such cases. This Rubric is wholly omitted, as the principle of reserving cases of conscience for special confessors, has been set aside. Being a question of discipline only, it touches no point in dispute between us and the Church of Rome.

In 1661 the Rubric directing the penitent to confess, as given above, was altered in two material points. It then assumed its present shape, which is as follows, the changes alluded to being marked by italics. “Here shall the sick person *be moved to* make a special confession *of his sins*, if he feel his conscience troubled with any weighty matter.”

These alterations brought back the rubric to a closer agreement with the old Latin form. Instead of leaving Confession to the sick person’s own discretion, as in the first reformed Office, the Priest was directed, as before the Reformation, to take the initiative, and, if he thought the case required it, himself induce the sick person to confess. The original rubric merely gave an opportunity of Confession, if desired. “Here shall the sick person,” &c. The

new rubric required the Priest to urge it. "Here shall the sick person be moved," &c.

The rubric is still opposed to the Latin rule, in maintaining the principle of discretionary Confession, with this additional variation—that in the Latin order the motives to be urged by the Priest are embodied in the directions given; in the English, the Priest is left to choose his own grounds of persuasion. They agree however in this—that in both cases the Priest is equally ordered to exert his influence, and suggest reasons calculated to act on the sick man's conscience. The insertion with regard to the sick person, that he "be moved," &c., was apparently made in order to counteract the growing tendency to evade Confession, as well as to compel the clergy to do their best to maintain the practice, and overcome any scruples they might feel in pressing it. Mr. Stretton observes, "This addition was made because in practice it was found that the clergy were slow and backward of themselves to perform a painful duty, nowhere by the letter of their vows enjoined upon them: since the Priest perhaps in many cases might not deem it any part of his office by the terms of the rubric to exhort the sick man to confession, and to receive absolution."¹

A yet further return to the old Latin use appears in the insertion, "of his sins," after, "special Confession." The sick person was directed before the Reformation to "confess all his sins." The only difference, therefore, remaining after this insertion, was in the omission of the word, "all."

That this reinsertion was not a mere incidental change without a special object, is evident from the contemporaneous introduction of fresh matter of a corresponding kind in the earlier part of the rubric. The rubric originally commenced as follows: "Then shall the Minister examine

¹ Stretton's Guide to the Infirm and Sick, p. 102.

whether he (the sick person) be in charity with all the world," &c. On the revision the following words in italics were added: "Then shall the Minister examine whether he *repent him truly of his sins, and* be in charity with all the world." The addition was doubtless intended to explain the mind of the Church on a practical question of considerable moment, which had been left undetermined in consequence of the omissions made in the first reformed Office. It was uncertain, according to the terms of the original rubric, whether, or no, the Priest receiving "a special confession," should confine himself to the one matter weighing on the sick man's conscience. The uncertainty was removed by the alteration in the rubric, which expressly extended the inquiry to the sick man's "sins," thus involving a review of his life as a whole.

This explanation supplied an omission of great practical moment. Forgiveness is not of individual sins, separately viewed, but of the person who has sinned. It implies a state or condition of repentance, a capacity for the reception of grace. Any one unrepented sin is inconsistent with such a state, and is consequently a hindrance to the gift of God. Repentance is the condition in which sin, as sin, and so all sin alike, is hated and renounced by the renewed will. It is not applicable to one fact only in the soul's history. Unless repentance touches sin itself in all its developments, as existing in the person, so far as they can be ascertained, it is not rightly felt towards any one sin. Consequently Confession cannot be confined to any one matter, unless the Priest has otherwise reason to be convinced of the true penitence of the person confessing. It is not indeed the fulness or exactness of detail on which the value of Confession depends. Nevertheless the Priest has to form a judgment whether the sense of sin be, humanly speaking, full and complete, or he cannot rightly absolve. He is not to

run the risk of casting pearls before swine ; he is not to hazard saying, "Peace, peace, when there is no peace." The Priest is therefore of necessity bound to test the general state of the person confessing, and not merely the one sin more especially burdening his soul, before he can exercise the ministry of reconciliation. He may see cause to dispense with the enumeration of other sins, or their details, to any extent, according to his discretion in any individual case ; but the rule of a full confession, where confession is made at all, ordinarily applies. If the rule be relaxed, it is so only because the mind of the Priest is otherwise satisfied. He is responsible that he "lay hands suddenly on no man," lest himself become "partaker of other men's sins ;" and Confession, or a readiness to confess, combined with such practical conditions as he may see fit to require, is to him the guarantee of the truth of the repentance, which the act of his ministry affirms.

The object of these last changes therefore was twofold. They gave a fuller and more definite rule to the Priest. They also pressed the use of Confession with greater authority and distinctness, in counteraction of the neglect into which the ordinance had fallen in the interval between the Reformation and the Savoy Conference.

The English Office, moreover, corresponds with the Latin, with the exception of only a few significant modifications, in the order concerning Absolution. In the Latin Office the direction is as follows : "Then let the priest absolve the sick person from all his sins, thus saying—Our LORD JESUS CHRIST of His great mercy absolve thee, and by the Authority of the Same our LORD JESUS CHRIST, and of the blessed Apostles, Peter and Paul, and by the authority committed to me, I absolve thee from all the sins which with a contrite heart and with thy mouth thou hast con-

fessed to me, and from all thy other sins which if thou hadst remembered, thou wouldest fully have confessed, and I restore thee to the Sacraments of the Church ; in the Name of the FATHER, the SON, and the HOLY GHOST. Amen."

The English order for the ministry of Absolution according to our first Prayer Book, was as follows : "*After which Confession, the Priest shall absolve him after this form. And the same form of Absolution shall be used in all private Confessions.*" In the second Prayer Book, as already stated, the expression, "*after this form,*" was changed into, "*after this sort,*" and the latter clause was erased.

The form of Absolution itself is expressed in the same terms in both the first and second Prayer Books. This has indeed never varied from the beginning, notwithstanding the many occasions of revision to which it has been subjected. It is as follows :—" Our LORD JESUS CHRIST, Who hath left power to His Church to absolve all sinners who truly repent and believe in Him, of His great mercy forgive thee thine offences : And by His authority committed to me, I absolve thee from all thy sins, In the Name of the FATHER, and of the SON, and of the HOLY GHOST. Amen."

It is most remarkable that this, the indicative, form of Absolution has been thus uniformly preserved. That it should have survived the pressure of foreign Protestantism during the latter days of Edward VI. is a most convincing proof, that the central principles of the Catholic doctrine of Confession were intended to be maintained intact by our Reformers, the dispute turning only on certain incidental features. The strongest possible argument, consistently with the acknowledged appeal to Antiquity, might have been urged for its rejection ; for the indicative form only dates from the thirteenth century.¹ The earlier forms of Absolu-

¹ Othobon, the Roman Legate, in A.D. 1268, first decreed in England ; "Let all who hear Confessions expressly absolve their penitents

tion were universally, as they still are in the East, precatory or optative. As the English Reformation took its stand on the teaching and practice of the primitive Church, it would have been strictly in accordance with this principle, to have substituted one of the earlier precatory forms. The opponents of the indicative form, and they were then doubtless many, could have made an unanswerable appeal in favour of such a substitution. The unquestioned adoption by our Reformers of the indicative form can be accounted for only on the supposition that they regarded it, notwithstanding its comparatively modern use, as a true expression of the primitive faith.

The variations in the English order, though few, are significant. "By the authority of the Blessed Apostles, Peter and Paul," is replaced by "Who hath left power to His Church;" thus bringing out the idea of the Church, the Body of CHRIST, as the organ of the HOLY GHOST, instead of seeming to confine the transmission of His grace to individual Apostles. "All thy sins," is substituted for "all the sins which thou hast confessed to me, and from all thy other sins, which, if thou hadst remembered, thou wouldst fully have confessed;" thus apparently excluding the positive obligation of "numbering" sins. "All sinners who truly repent and believe in Him," is inserted instead of, "with a contrite heart and with thy mouth;" the later expression being removed, perhaps as seeming to imply that oral confession is itself an essential condition, and necessary title to forgiveness. Lastly, "I restore thee to the Sacraments of the Church," is omitted, because properly applicable only where Church censures had been imposed.

The care with which these minute alterations were made,

by pronouncing the underwritten words,—'By the authority of which I am possessed, I absolve thee from thy sins.' See chapter xvii., where this particular question is more fully considered.

is one of the most notable circumstances in the eventful history of that period. It is the most striking proof of the thoughtful anxiety to preserve accuracy of statement on a most momentous question in the midst of a violent convulsion. Our form of Absolution is also a remarkable specimen of the force and completeness of expression, which mark our Prayer Book translations from the original Latin. Mr. Maskell pays an honourable tribute to its compilers in special reference to this Absolution. "The form," he says, "thus condensed and completed, is as perfect an expression of the truth of the ministry as can well be conceived, and is unequalled in the ritual of any portion of Christendom. There is the declaration of the power of Absolution, and of the qualifications necessary to the recipient; a short prayer that our LORD would forgive the penitent; an assertion by the minister that to him individually this power has been committed; the exercise of that power, closing with the awful Name of the Blessed and Undivided Trinity."¹

It has been urged, and no ordinary authority pleaded in favour of the opinion, that this solemn form of Absolution relates, not to sins, but to Church censures.

The mere solemnity of the language would seem to be irreconcilable with such an interpretation, but the following reasons moreover combine to disprove it.

(1.) The corresponding terms in the Latin Office had undoubtedly reference to sin; for ecclesiastical censures were mentioned in a separate clause in the same form of Absolution. "I restore thee to the Sacraments of the Church," was subjoined to, "I absolve thee from thy sins." If the Reformers had intended to limit the Absolution to a release from Church censures, why retain the latter, and omit the former, phrase? Or if they thought to adopt the latter with

¹ Maskell on Absolution, p. 250.

an altered meaning, how could such an intention be understood, unless it were explained? But no such explanation is given.

(2.) The whole context relates to sins. The Priest is to inquire into the sick man's "sins." The sick man is to be "moved" to confess "his sins." Can the term, "sins," be used in one sense in the rubric, and in a totally different sense in the Absolution? Throughout the Office no mention occurs of Church censures. Nor can Church censures be meant as the "weighty matter" troubling the sick man's conscience, which occasions the Confession.

(3.) The sins alluded to, as the special reason for Confession, are from the very nature of the case secret. They are such as the Priest knows only through the penitent's confession made at the time. But sins involving ecclesiastical censures must be notorious, such as had either been previously confessed, or were so public as not to need it.

(4.) It is no part of a Priest's office to release from Church censures. He needs for the purpose a special commission from his Bishop. But there is no indication of any commission being here supposed, and the Absolution is enjoined to be given, when desired, as an act of ordinary priestly authority.

(5.) In 1641, and again in 1661, when the Prayer Book was under review, the Nonconformists raised objections to this indicative form of Absolution, and desired that it might be made declaratory. Mr. Cooke, remarking on the circumstance, well observes; "How easy it would have been for the Bishops to have answered, that nothing but a release from Church censures was meant, if such had been considered to be the object of the Absolution." The very ground of the objection was the use of such a form in the forgiveness of sin, because it was supposed, though erroneously, to imply some independent personal power in the

Priest; and it is inconceivable that the difficulty should not have been removed by so ready an explanation, if such were the meaning of the terms. But the answer of the Bishops to the objectors, while supporting the use of the authorised form, clearly affirms the contrary. "The form of absolution," thus they replied, "is more agreeable to the Scriptures than that which they desire, it being said in S. John xx., 'Whose sins ye remit, they are remitted,' not, 'whose sins ye pronounce remitted : ' and the condition needs not to be expressed, being always necessarily understood."¹ It is clear that both the objectors and the respondents alike believed the debateable words to relate to the actual forgiveness of sin in the ordinary acceptation of the terms. There could have been no possible objection to the use of the indicative form in a release from ecclesiastical censures.

(6.) The chief authority for the supposed interpretation is Wheatley, and he is the first Commentator on the Prayer Book who takes this view. Such an interpretation is the more extraordinary in Wheatley, who explains the Absolution at Mattins and Evensong to be "an actual conveyance of pardon at the very instant of pronouncing it, to all that come within the terms proposed." Can we possibly admit the solemn act in the Visitation of the Sick after special confession, to be of less value than that which is daily ministered after a general confession in the ordinary daily office?

Bingham, whose knowledge of antiquity is unquestioned, and whose sympathies are well known to have been in favour of the lower view of Absolution, entirely rejects this interpretation, when advanced by Fell. "Bishop Fell indeed," thus Bingham writes, "has a more singular notion of

¹ Cardwell's History of Conferences on the Book of Common Prayer. P. 361.

the form, 'absolvo te;' he supposes that in every crime there are two things to be considered, viz., the offence against God, and the offence against the Church; the former of which is forgiven by God alone upon men's prayers and repentance, but the latter by this authoritative form, 'I absolve thee.' But this, though it may be true with respect to crimes which fall under public discipline, cannot well be the meaning of the form, as it is used in our Liturgy, in the Office of the Visitation of the Sick. For in private sins there is no offence given to the Church, and yet it is private sins, confessed privately to a minister, for which that rubric orders absolution to be given in this form, 'absolvo te.'"¹

A further change in the same rubric, made at the revision of 1661, deserves notice. The parenthetical sentence requiring an expression of desire for Absolution on the part of the sick person ("if he humbly and heartily desire it,") was then for the first time inserted. One object was no doubt to prevent the risk of profanation in the case of so solemn an act, by guarding the Priest against the possibility of a mere perfunctory service, and by stimulating in the sick person a sense of the need of his own concurrence in the act of Absolution, as an indispensable qualification for its due reception. Mr. Stretton thus explains the purpose of the order; "Lest the Priest should, through carelessness, haste, or from any other like unpardonable cause, pronounce absolution on one, who although he has confessed his sin, has yet given no sufficient proof of penitence, and lest the sick man be ignorant of the nature of the action, or rite performed over him, what the benefits thereof, and what are the recipient's qualifications for its efficacious use, it is

¹ Bingham's second letter on Absolution, ad finem. Vol. viii. p. 414, 8vo. edit.

ordered that absolution be not given unless 'he humbly and heartily desire it.'¹

The addition is an evidence of the care taken to make the ministry of reconciliation a living and intelligent service on the part both of the Priest and the penitent.

To the penitent the words may act as a quickening of a need, of which he is not sufficiently conscious. It is a warrant to the Priest, should he have doubts of the sick man's spiritual condition, for not withholding Absolution from him in his great necessity, if he but heartily desire it. The imminence of the danger admits not of delay, and the Church hopes even against hope for the safety of her children.

There is a yet further correspondence to be noted between the Latin and English Offices. In both alike the Absolution is followed by the collect which had been in use for at least 1000 years before the Reformation throughout the Western Church, in reconciling dying penitents.² After the intro-

¹ Stretton, *Visitatio Infirmorum*. Introduction.

² It is found in the Sacramentary of Gelasius, A.D. 494. See Palmer's *Orig. Lit.* c. viii., vol. ii. p. 226. It is given by Palmer, and by Maskell, *Monumenta*, vol. i. p. 82, from the Sarum Manual.

I am indebted to Mr. Scudamore for a Latin version of this prayer belonging to our Church, which comes still nearer to our own than that of Sarum, and seems evidently to be the original from which the Prayer Book version was taken.

The prayer is entitled, "ad reconciliandos pœnitentes feria V. in Coena Domini," and is taken by Martene (*Lib. i. c. vi. Art. vi. ord. ii.*) "ex MS. Pontificali *Anglicano* monasterii Gemmeticensis, cujus character annos circiter nongentos refert;"—

"Deus misericors, Deus clemens, qui secundum multitudinem miserationum tuarum peccata pœnitentium deles, et prœteritorum (*sic*) culpas venia remissionis evacuas, respice *propiti* super hunc famulum tuum, et remissionem omnium peccatorum suorum tota cordis *confessione* poscentem deprecatus exaudi; renova in eo, piissime Pater, *quic-*

duction of the indicative form of Absolution it was still retained, though necessarily taking a subordinate position. The following is an exact version of the original. The more important alterations made in the corrected translation of our office, are given in italics, and bracketed :—

“O most merciful GOD, Who, according to the multitude of Thy mercies, dost blot out the sins of those who are penitent, and extinguish by the grace of forgiveness the stains of past transgressions, look mercifully upon this Thy servant, who with a truly contrite heart desireth the remission of all his sins. Renew in him, most loving FATHER, whatever hath been decayed by the fraud of the devil, and restore [*preserve and continue*] this sick member to [*in*] the unity of the Church through the remission of his sins. Pity, O LORD, his groanings, his tears, his tribulation of heart, and forasmuch as he putteth his full trust in Thy mercy, admit him to the sacrament of reconciliation [*impute not unto him his former sins, but strengthen him with Thy Blessed Spirit, and when Thou art pleased to take him hence, take him unto Thy favour*], through JESUS CHRIST our LORD. Amen.”

It has been urged that this collect is incompatible with

quid terrenâ fragilitate corruptum, vel quicquid diabolicâ fraude violatum est, et in unitate corporis Ecclesiæ tuæ perfectâ remissione restitue. Miserere, Domine, gemituum, miserere lacrymarum, et non habentem fiduciam nisi in tua misericordia, ad sacramentum reconciliationis admitte. Per.”

It may seem to be at variance with the assertion in the text, that in the Sarum Office of the Visitation of the Sick an Absolution follows this prayer. But though called “Absolutio,” it is not like the full and formal conveyance of forgiveness immediately following Confession. It is a shorter form, and seems rather to express the mind of the congregation as giving its Amen to the previous act of the Priest. “Absolvimus te,” &c., not, as before, “Ego auctoritate mihi tradita absolvo te.”

the idea of forgiveness being conveyed through the preceding Absolution, because it is itself a prayer for forgiveness. This objection, however, applies equally to the Latin as to the English Office; for in both it stands in the same relative position. This fact is alone a sufficient answer to the objection; for there is no question, that in the Roman Church the collect has always been considered compatible with the fullest belief in the efficacy of the previous Absolution. Our Reformers were but perpetuating the pre-Reformation use in retaining it. Moreover, where is the necessity for supposing more inconsistency in the use of such a collect after Absolution, than is felt in the use of the LORD'S Prayer, which contains a petition for forgiveness, and which is often added almost instinctively? A precisely parallel case occurs in the Office for Adult Baptism. In the collect immediately succeeding the act of Baptism, there follows the petition; "Give Thy HOLY SPIRIT to this person;" and yet the act itself of baptism is before described as the "renewing of the HOLY GHOST." The explanation of this petition following after Baptism, is founded on the momentous truth, that the gift of the HOLY GHOST is not an isolated or completed gift, but a continuous and progressive act of God. It is therefore a petition for perpetuating and perfecting a work already begun. In like manner the collect, following the act of Absolution, impresses the equally momentous truth, that the remission of sins, and repentance, which is its condition, are not completed, but progressive and advancing states; that all absolutions in this world must ever be in a measure imperfect, inasmuch as they are but anticipatory of, and dependent on, the final Absolution of the day of Judgment, because given in a state which can never be altogether free from liability to err even in the very act of its reception.

It is most important to note, however, that our Reformers

felt the inconsistency of the collect as it previously stood, and made changes which are evidently grounded on the full belief of a previous conveyance of forgiveness. For how, except under this idea, can we account for the substitution of the terms, "*preserve and continue*" instead of, "*restore*" this sick member to the unity of the Church,—words manifestly implying the conviction, that the penitent was already reunited by a living grace to the Church, as the organ and Body of CHRIST, and only needed the preservation and continuance of that vital bond ; or, again, for the omission of the closing petition, "admit him to the sacrament of reconciliation," and the substitution in its stead of "*impute not unto him his former sins*," (a deprecation of merited punishment notwithstanding the forgiveness) "*but strengthen him with Thy blessed Spirit ?*" This last alteration is most remarkable, and conclusive as to the point at issue ; for it implies a clear belief, that the penitent had been already admitted to the "sacrament of reconciliation," and that he only needed thenceforth a deliverance from the temporal consequences of his sin, and a continued increase of the grace of the HOLY SPIRIT now restored to him.

Mr. Stretton observes that this collect, "in the case of special confession and formal absolution, completes and confirms the absolution ; in all other cases it supplies and takes the place of that rite."¹ Comber took a similar view, and Bishop Mant by quoting him adds his own authority to the explanation. He remarks ; "That this comfortable dispensing of remission," viz., the "formal absolution" before given, "may not want its due effect, we add a prayer after it, to beg of GOD to ratify His own act, and to declare that He hath done so by other visible testimonies of His favour, by renewing in the

¹ *Visitatio Infirmorum*. Introduction, p. xcix.

sick person the graces of faith, hope, devotion, and sincere obedience.”¹

The facts recorded in this and the preceding chapter sufficiently refute the supposition, that the mention of Confession in our Prayer Book was an accommodation to temporary circumstances, and intended only to satisfy a lingering attachment to long established habits, our Reformers really having the covert desire, that the practice should die out, as soon as the people were prepared for the more complete change, which, if practicable, they would at once have established. We find on the contrary that a full century after the Reformation, when its purpose was matured, after Puritanism had risen to its height of power, for a while even overwhelming the Church, and suppressing the Prayer Book; when there could have been no popular pressure in favour of Confession—these various provisions and rules were, not only not withdrawn, but renewed with increased definiteness, and brought into greater prominence than before. Nor is it to be forgotten that the very persons who superintended this final revision, had given the surest proof of their loyal attachment to the Church, by adhering to her in her lowest period of abasement, themselves proscribed, banished, or able only to use her Offices in secret, and with every temporal inducement to abandon her either for one of the sects, or for the then more prosperous Church of Rome.

¹ Comber on the Common Prayer, p. iv. sec. iv. 2; Mant's Book of Common Prayer, ad loc.

NOTE.

A comparative view of the forms of Absolution and the rubrics connected with it, to which reference has been made :—

Latin Office, according to the rite of Sarum.

1st and 2nd Book of Edward VI.

Revision of 1661.

Deinde stabilito sic infirmo in fide, caritate et spe, dicat ei sacerdos : Carissime frater, si velis ad visionem Dei pervenire, oportet omnino quod sis mundus in mente et purus in conscientia ; ait enim Christus in Evangelio ; Beati mundi corde, quoniam ipsi Deum videbunt. Si ergo vis mundum cor et conscientiam sanam habere, peccata tua universa confitere.

Deinde absolvat sacerdos infirmum ab omnibus peccatis suis hoc modo dicens :

Dominus noster Jesus Christus pro sua magna pietate te absolvat ; et ego auctoritate ejusdem Dei Domini nostri Jesu Christi, et beatorum Apostolorum Petri et Pauli, et auctoritate mihi tradita, absolvo te ab omnibus pec-

Here shall the sick person make a special Confession, if he feel his conscience troubled with any weighty matter, after which Confession the Priest shall absolve him after this form ; and the same form of Absolution shall be used in all private confessions.

Our LORD JESUS CHRIST, Who hath left power to His Church to absolve all sinners which truly repent and believe in Him, of His great mercy forgive thee thine offences ; and by His authority committed to me, I absolve thee from all thy sins, in the Name of the FATHER, and of the SON, and of the HOLY GHOST. Amen.

Then shall the minister examine whether he repent him truly of his sins, &c.

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Here shall the sick person be moved to make a special Confession of his sins, if he feel his conscience troubled with any weighty matter. After which Confession, the Priest shall absolve him (if he humbly and heartily desire it) after this sort :

Our LORD JESUS CHRIST, Who hath left power to His Church, &c.

cris his de quibus
corde contritus et ore
mihi confessus es ; et
ab omnibus aliis pec-
catis tuis de quibus si
tuæ occurrerent me-
moræ libenter con-
fiteri velles ; et Sa-
cramentis ecclesiæ te
restituo : In nomine
Patris, et Filii, et Spi-
ritus Sancti. Amen.

If it should appear to any that too much stress has been laid on minute changes in the Rubrics and Offices, or that too much has been claimed in support of High Church teaching from the history of these changes, let the thoughtful and pregnant words of Alexander Knox, in reference to a strictly kindred subject, be carefully weighed.

“The distress of the English Episcopal Church during the Usurpation had more than ever endeared her to her genuine children. A revision, therefore, of the Liturgy being called for, the revisers seized the opportunity, (contrary to what the public was reckoning upon) of introducing changes, not more puritanical, but more Catholic. They effected this, no doubt stealthily, and to appearance by the minutest alteration ; but to compare the Communion Service, as it now stands, especially its Rubrics, with the form in which we find it previously to that transaction, will be to discover that without any change of features that could cause alarm, a new spirit was then breathed into our Communion Service, principally by a few significant circumstance. in the manner of conducting the business, which were fitted to impress the devout, though certain to be fully understood only by the initiated. Who can doubt of this transaction being, in all its bearings, providential ? And yet it was clearly insufficient to produce any extended or striking effects. It has actually escaped general observation. Wheatley on the Liturgy notices the changes ; but though himself a High Churchman, overlooks their import. What then can we suppose, but that these changes were meant by Providence to subserve ulterior movements, to lie dormant, as it were, until nearer the time of the end, when it might suit the order of Providence, that what was before deposited as seed should grow up into a rich and luxuriant harvest ?”—Remains of Alexander Knox, vol. i. p. 59.

CHAPTER VIII.

ORDINATION SERVICE FOR PRIESTS.

THE Ministry of Confession presupposes a Divine Commission. It is necessary, therefore, to consider the powers which, according to our Ordination Office, are committed to Priests.

The form in which the Commission is conveyed, is as follows :—

“Receive the HOLY GHOST for the office and work of a Priest in the Church of God, now committed unto thee by the imposition of our hands. Whose sins thou dost forgive, they are forgiven, and whose sins thou dost retain, they are retained. And be thou a faithful dispenser of the word of God, and of His holy Sacraments; in the Name of the FATHER, and of the SON, and of the HOLY GHOST. Amen.”

This form is divisible into two distinct parts; (1.) Our LORD’S own words of ordination, unceasingly reiterated from age to age with ever fresh creative powers; “Receive ye the HOLY GHOST,” &c.; and (2.) the voice of the Church describing the sphere of action within which this Commission is to be exercised; “and be thou a faithful dispenser,” &c.

These latter words are to be viewed in connection with the third question previously put to the candidates for the Priesthood “touching their duties;” “Will you give your

faithful diligence always so to minister the doctrine and sacraments and the discipline of CHRIST, as the LORD hath commanded, and as this Church and realm hath received the same, according to the commandments of GOD; so that you may teach the people committed to your cure and charge, with all diligence to keep and observe the same?"

Three Priestly functions are thus clearly specified; the ministry (1) of the Word of GOD, (2) of the Sacraments, and (3) of the Discipline of CHRIST.

The words of ordination; "Whose sins thou dost remit, they are remitted," &c. are, according to the Church's uniform tradition, to be understood in two senses, one comprehensive, embracing the whole sphere of the ministry; the other, restrictive, as specially denoting those offices which were ordained for the remission of sins, as their characteristic object.

Dr. Pusey quotes S. Cyril, as an authority for both interpretations of the words. Summing up S. Cyril's teaching as to the first, or more general sense of the words, he says;¹ "S. Cyril unites the office of teaching as one part of the object of this gift of the HOLY GHOST, or rather he contemplates that gift, as a whole, in its varied bearings. Authority, power to forgive sins, working of miracles, wisdom, and all the divers operations of the Spirit, are thus included in this gift. Yet this does not, of course, involve any confusion; S. Cyril passes from one to the other." Explaining the same words in their restricted sense, S. Cyril says; "Guided by the Spirit they remit or retain sins in two ways, as I suppose. For either they call

¹ Dr. Pusey's Sermon on the "Entire Absolution of the Penitent," note 3, to p. 29. 1846. The reference is to S. Cyril. Alex. Comm. in S. Joh. Ev. ch. xx. 21.

those to Baptism, who, for the seemliness of their life, and their approved faith, ought to obtain it, or they hinder and exclude from the Divine grace (i.e. Baptism) some who are not as yet worthy of it. Or in another way they remit and retain sin, correcting the children of the Church when sinning, and pardoning them when repenting, as Paul delivered the fornicator at Corinth to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit might be saved, and again received him."¹

S. Ambrose also interprets the words in this specific sense; "GOD is able, when He willeth, to forgive us sins, even those which we think cannot be forgiven. . . . It seemed impossible that water should wash away sin. . . . In like manner it seemed impossible that sins should be forgiven through penitence. CHRIST granted this to His Apostles, which from the Apostles was transmitted to the office of the Priest; that therefore was rendered possible which seemed impossible."² Again; "Why baptize ye, if sins may not be remitted through man? For in Baptism is the remission of all sins. Where is the difference, whether through penitence, or through the laver, the priests exert this power given to them? One is the mystery in both. But thou sayest, that in the laver the grace of the mysteries worketh. What in penitence? Worketh not the Name of GOD?"³

These eventful words gradually acquired a yet more restricted sense, which became increasingly emphatic when the Novatian heresy arose; for the dispute between the orthodox Fathers and the Novatians turned on the question, whether these words of our LORD applied as fully to the ministry of Penance as to that of Baptism. And as the

¹ S. Cyril in loc. quoted in the note to the same sermon, p. 32.

² S. Ambrose de Pœnit. ii. 2, quoted in the same sermon, p. 7.

³ De Pœnit. i. 8, § 37, quoted in the same sermon, p. 7.

Novatians denied this interpretation, the orthodox Fathers were led to lay the greater stress on their application to Penance. Thus S. Chrysostom employs the words as if they were limited to the one grace of Absolution. "Through the Priests of GOD do we put on CHRIST; are buried with the SON of GOD, and become members of that blessed Head; by them we are not only regenerated, but the sins after this they have power to *remit*."¹ Hooker also applies the words in this narrower sense, when enumerating the priestly offices in his well-known description; "What angel in heaven could have said to man, as our LORD did unto Peter, 'Feed My sheep; Preach, Baptize: Do this in remembrance of Me: Whose sins ye retain, they are retained; and their offences in heaven pardoned, whose faults you shall on earth forgive?' What think we? Are these terrestrial sounds, or else are they voices uttered out of the clouds above?"² During the middle ages both the maintainers and opponents of the new scholastic doctrines, while differing in matters of detail, agreed in deducing from these words the principles of sacramental Confession and Absolution. The Roman advocates, as we have seen, even grounded on them their belief of the necessity of Confession; and they are referred to in the canons of the Council of Trent, as the Scriptural proof of this necessity.³

The careful retention therefore of these words in the English Ordinal proves, that our Reformers had no desire to abandon the essential features of the ministry in question. To retain these words in their original position in the Ordinal, and at the same time hope to disconnect them from the ministry of forgiveness of sins, would have been vain. Nor was there any obligation according to primitive

¹ De Sacerdotio, iii. 6.

² Eccl. Pol. b. v. ch. lxxvii. § 1.

³ Conc. Trid. Sess. xiv. ; De Pœnitentiâ, cap. v. ; also Catech. Trid. p. ii. ; De Pœn. Sacra. cliv.

Catholic use, to retain these words as the form of Ordination. They were not in the Ordinal in primitive times. They were introduced in comparatively recent days. For at least 1000 years the grace of Ordination was conveyed simply by the imposition of hands with prayer.¹ Our Reformers, therefore, grounding their judgment on primitive customs, in contrast with those of later date, might, in perfect consistency with their position, have abandoned these words, and returned to the simple primitive use. It was a precisely similar case with the indicative form of Absolution in the Visitation of the Sick. Both forms were mediæval; both were identified with High Church views. The words of the form of Ordination were indeed our LORD's own words, and therefore could not themselves be set aside; but had it been supposed that they were falsely applied, or abused, they might have been removed from the position in which, if retained, this false application or abuse would certainly be perpetuated. The only reasonable account of their retention is, that this special application was held by the Reformers to be substantially true. They carefully retained them, only guarding them against certain modern

¹ The earliest record of the use of these words in the Ordination of a Priest, is an incidental notice in the Life of Lietbert, Bishop of Cambray, in the tenth century. (C. 17, Spicileg. tom. 9.) They are not mentioned by the Ritualists, Isidore, Amalarius, Rabanus, Micrologus, &c., nor are they found in any Pontifical (though very many are extant) earlier than the close of the twelfth century. See Martene, *De Antiq. Eccl. Rit.* l. i. c. viii. Art. ix.—xii. The older form of ordination was by the prayer such as is still used in the Latin Office after the first imposition of hands: the second imposition of hands, as well as the words, "Receive ye the HOLY GHOST," &c., being a later addition. In the East the Greeks and Syrians still use only prayer for the gift of the HOLY GHOST, as was the case originally in the West, the form of words differing; nor have they ever adopted into their ordinal the words, "Receive ye the HOLY GHOST," &c. See Courayer, cap. vi., *The Form of Ordination*, p. 96. Oxford edit.

interpretations and inferences which had become entangled with them, by protests and appeals to primitive testimony elsewhere sufficiently recorded.

Neither were these words retained without a full consciousness of the unsacramental theories, which at the time of the Reformation were associated with them. The advocates for change in our Ordinal at the present day are not more opposed to the sacramental view, than were the ultra-Protestants of the Reformation period. Zwingli, e.g., paraphrasing these words, said; "It is as though CHRIST said, 'To whomsoever ye preach the Gospel, and they receive it, to them sins are remitted.' For in the last chapter of S. Mark He expresses this more clearly; 'Preach the Gospel to every creature,' 'he that believeth shall be saved,' i.e., whoso believeth the Gospel preached by you. The remitting sins then is ascribed to the Apostles, because they preach that through which sins are remitted; for they preach the Gospel, or CHRIST Himself, or the grace of GOD through CHRIST, by which sin is remitted."¹ And Calvin to the same effect; "It is clear that in those places (S. Matt. xvi.; S. John xx.) the power of the keys is simply the preaching of the Gospel."² Again Peter Martyr, whose influence with the English Bishops was one chief cause of the changes made in the first Prayer Book, says; "The key is twofold, the one of preaching the Word of GOD, the other of believing it when heard: one doth not open or remit sins without the other. That key is in truth nothing else than the Word of GOD, not given to Priests more than to others, but to all Christians."³

In opposition to such doctrine the voice of the Church of

¹ In Hist. Dom. Res. Quoted by Dr. Pusey in note B. pp. 71, 2, at the end of his sermon, "Absolution of the Penitent."

² Instit. iv. 1, 22, quoted by Dr. Pusey in the same note, p. 72.

³ Serm. in S. John xx., quoted by Dr. Pusey, *ibid.* pp. 72, 73.

England was heard at the very same time, speaking in the clearest and most express language, affirming the direct contrary to the teaching of these foreign Reformers. The Homily for Whit-Sunday says; "CHRIST ordained the authority of the keys to excommunicate notorious sinners, and to absolve them which are truly penitent."¹ Cranmer's Catechism teaches the same truth more fully; "Now GOD doth not speak to us with a voice sounding out of heaven, but He hath given the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and the authority to forgive sin by the ministers of the Church. Wherefore let him that is a sinner go to one of them; let him acknowledge and confess his sin, and pray him that according to GOD's commandment, he will give him Absolution and comfort him with the word of grace and forgiveness of his sins. And when the minister doth so, then I ought steadfastly to believe, that my sins are truly forgiven me in heaven, and such a faith is able to stand strong in all skirmishes and assaults of our mortal enemy, the devil; forasmuch as it is builded on a sure rock, that is to say, the certain word and work of GOD. For he that is absolved, knoweth for a surety that his sins be forgiven him by the minister, and he knoweth assuredly also that the minister hath authority from GOD Himself to do so. And, thirdly, he knoweth that GOD hath made this promise to His ministers, and said to them; 'To whom ye forgive sins on earth, to him also they shall be forgiven in heaven.' Wherefore despise not Absolution, for it is the commandment and ordinance of GOD, and the HOLY SPIRIT of GOD is present and causeth these things to take effect in us and to work our salvation."²

¹ Second Part.

² "On the power of the keys," Catech. Cranmer's works, vol. iv. p. 283, ed. Jenkyns.

Cranmer's vacillations of mind are often and justly urged against

Cranmer published his Catechism in 1548. In 1549 he with his colleagues prepared the Ordinal. The one is therefore explanatory of the other. In 1562 the Homily for Whit-Sunday was published. Thus these documents together form an authoritative catena of doctrine, stretching throughout the most critical period of the Reformation. Even Jewel, so often quoted as the great authority in favour of an opposite view, yet in one of his strongest passages on preaching, which he describes as an exercise of the "power of the keys," implies that Absolution is also an exercise of the same ministry. "The keys," Jewel says, "by which they (the Priests) are able either to close or open the kingdom of heaven, we, as Chrysostom, say, that they are 'the

arguments drawn from his expressions of opinion. A distinction, however, ought to be made between his private writings, and the public documents which he was authorised to draw up. But further, Mr. Cooke has shown that on the point in question, involving the doctrine of the Priesthood, and the Ordinal, his finally settled views coincided with those expressed in his Catechism. "In 1540, Cranmer had expressed decidedly Erastian views, adding however, as if doubtful of their soundness, 'This is mine opinion and sentence at this present, which nevertheless I do not temerariouſly define, but refer the judgment thereof wholly to your Majesty.' Several of the divines who assisted Cranmer in drawing up the Ordinal, expressed opinions in 1540, diametrically opposed to the Archbishop. In 1543, a book was put forth by the King and Convocation, called 'A Necessary Doctrine,' which defines 'order' to be 'the gift or grace of ministration in CHRIST's Church, given of GOD to Christian men by the consecration and imposition of the Bishop's hands,' and declares the succession to be perpetual even to the end of the world. In 1548 Cranmer himself put forth the Catechism in which Apostolic succession and the power of the keys are set forth, and insisted on most strongly. 'It is plain,' Bishop Burnet remarks, 'that Cranmer had now quite laid aside those singular opinions which he formerly held of the Ecclesiastical functions; for now in a work of his own, without the concurrence of any other, he fully sets forth their divine Institution.'" Cooke's *Power of the Priesthood*, p. 63.

knowledge of the Scriptures;' or as Tertullian, 'the interpretation of the law;' or as Eusebius, 'the word of GOD.' Moreover that the disciples of CHRIST received this power, not that they should hear the private confessions of the people, or listen to their whisperings, as all Priests now everywhere do, and do it so, as if in that wholly and alone (in eo toto) *lay all the virtue and use of the keys*: but that they should go, that they should teach, that they should publish the Gospel."¹ Jewel's reference to the Fathers, S. Chrysostom, Tertullian, and Eusebius, shows that he intended his words to be understood in their sense, and his expressions prove that he was not denying *a* real virtue and use of the keys in Absolution, but only condemning so exclusive an application of the words to that one ministry, as to result in a practical disparagement of the earnest and intelligent preaching of the word of GOD in its power of co-operation toward the same end.

The ultra-Reformers sought to magnify preaching to the detriment of the inner ministry of Confession. The leading directors of the English Reformation rather aimed at restoring the balance between the two, seeking earnestly to develop an intelligent use of the Word of GOD, as the truest means of giving life to sacramental ordinances,—a characteristic feature of the mind of the Church of England, which Dr. Wordsworth, in a well known manual, thus expresses: "A right sentence is the only one which CHRIST has authorised, and the only one which He will ratify, by giving it validity spiritually and internally. 'Clavis *potestatis* nihil operatur sine clave *scientiæ*.' The key of *knowledge* and *direction* is necessary to give effect to that of *power*. No one can be admitted through the door of pardon, who has not passed through that of penitence. CHRIST alone 'openeth and no man shutteth, and shutteth and no man openeth,' and He

¹ Jewel's Apology.

turns the key in the hand of His minister *only* when it is used *aright*.”¹

Further, the several functions of the Priesthood, as a threefold power of ministry, set forth in the Ordinal, correspond with the description given in the Homilies of the “notes” of a true Church. “And it (the Church) hath always three notes or marks whereby it is known ; pure and sound doctrine, the Sacraments ministered according to CHRIST’s holy institution, and the right use of Ecclesiastical discipline.”²

We are here concerned only with the third or last “note” of the Church, to which, as we have seen, a special application of the words of ordination has always been made. “Discipline,”³ which in the above passage of the Homily, as in the Ordinal, is indicated as the third function of the Priesthood, is expressed likewise in a document of the time of Queen Elizabeth, drawn up by Parker and his fellow Bishops, under the corresponding term, “the authority of the keys.” “The pure Word of GOD is preached, and the Sacraments are administered according to CHRIST’s institution, and the authority of the keys is retained.”⁴ The threefold division is the same, though the language varies. The same expression is again used in “certain principal Articles of Religion appointed to be read by parsons, vicars,

¹ Theophilus Anglicanus, xiv. “Absolution.”

² Homily for Whit-Sunday, part ii.

³ The term “discipline” was thus used by the Fathers, as e.g., by S. Augustine ; “Disciplinam qui abjicit, infelix est, qui negat, crudelis est.” Sermon. xiii. And again ; “Ecclesiastica Disciplina medicinalis vindicta, terribilis lenitas, charitatis severitas.” In Ps. lxiii., IV. 895, quoted by Wordsworth. Theoph. Anglic. ch. xiii., Power of the Keys.

⁴ “The Interpretations and Further Considerations of Queen Elizabeth’s Injunctions.” Cardwell’s Document. Annals. No. xliii., vol. i. p. 240, 2nd edit.

and curates, at their first possession taking," dated A.D. 1559. "I do acknowledge that Church to be the Spouse of CHRIST, wherein the word of GOD is truly taught, the Sacraments orderly ministered according to CHRIST's institution, and the authority of the keys duly used."¹

Ecclesiastical "discipline" has been expressly explained by our Church, and the explanation is of great moment in our inquiry. It is shown to be not merely a means of correction for the sake of moral order or example, but a spiritual ministry affecting the soul's life before God. The Communion Service declares the object of "Penance" to be, "that their souls may be saved in the day of the LORD." In the form of excommunication drawn up under the supervision of Archbishop Tenison, and approved by Convocation, it is likewise viewed as bearing on the Judgment of the world to come; "They (the ancient governors of the Church) looked upon a sentence duly passed on earth, as a certain anticipation of that which would be passed in heaven, if not prevented in time by penitential submission."²

It is to be noted that the history of "discipline" in the Church of England closely resembles what occurred in the early Catholic Church. Public Penance was the mode of discipline first established, and earnestly sought to be maintained, by the Fathers both of the East and West. When it failed, they fell back on the private ministry as the only practicable, but still, as they judged, the sufficient means of exercising the power of the keys. The rulers of the Church of England from the Reformation down to the times of

¹ See Cardwell's Document. Annals. No. xlv., vol. i. p. 264.

² Synodalia, p. 807, quoted by the Bishop of S. Andrew's, Dr. C. Wordsworth, in an Appendix to his Sermon, "Evangelical Repentance," No. 36. This Appendix is specially valuable for its full details on the subject of Church discipline.

Bishop Wilson,—“who,” as Dr. Wordsworth says, “of all witnesses which have raised up their voices in our Church, in support of discipline, not only in his writings, but in his practice also, presents the fullest and most valuable testimony,”¹—used their utmost efforts to restore what the Fathers had so earnestly desired, though in vain, to uphold. The Church of England, like the Church of old, failing to accomplish this object, has in like manner fallen back on the private ministry of Confession, as the only resource for carrying into effect this necessary function of its ministerial powers.

It can hardly fail to be a matter for serious reflection to those who cannot recognize in private Confession a legitimate ministry of the power of the keys, that according to their views, during the present abeyance of public Penance, the Church of England has entirely forfeited what she yet asserts to be a “note” of the true Church. The only escape from this conclusion is, to suppose that the mere desire for the restoration of public Penance as a thing “much to be wished,” once in the year expressed in our public penitential service, when years as they pass by give no improving prospect of such restoration, is a sufficient guarantee for the virtual possession of this essential ministry. They on the contrary, and they alone, who hold, that every one within the Church of England seeking it, may now, as of old, find the full benefit of forgiveness of post-baptismal sins personally applied to their great comfort through special private Confession and Absolution,—testify by such belief, that the Church is still true in her claim to be in possession of a Priesthood fully empowered, and with sufficient means at command, to minister this vital sacramental grace.

¹ Ibid. p. 97.

CHAPTER IX.

THE TWENTY-FIFTH ARTICLE.

THE Twenty-fifth Article is often quoted as irreconcilable with sacramental views of Confession. The words referred to are as follows :

“There are two Sacraments ordained of CHRIST our LORD in the Gospel, that is to say, Baptism and the Supper of the LORD. Those five commonly called sacraments, that is to say, Confirmation, Penance, Orders, Matrimony, and Extreme Unction, are not to be counted for sacraments of the Gospel, being such as have grown partly of the corrupt following of the Apostles, partly are states of life allowed in the Scriptures ; but yet have not like nature of sacraments with Baptism and the LORD’s Supper ; for that they have not any visible sign or ceremony ordained of GOD.”

The language of this article is obscure ; but, while denying Penance to be a sacrament equal to Baptism, or the LORD’s Supper, it does not follow that it therefore represents it as devoid of sacramental virtue. If this were so, the statement would be inconsistent with the Thirty-third Article, which affirms that an excommunicate person is “to be reconciled by penance ;” and also with the judgment of Parker, from whose hands the Articles took their last shape, who in his Visitation Articles of 1567 reckons as one among “unwholesome, erroneous, and seditious doctrines,” the

position, "that mortal or voluntary sins, committed after Baptism, be not remissible by penance."¹ For the virtue implied in the gift of remission or reconciliation is a spiritual grace, and therefore the form or means of imparting it must be sacramental. It is no sufficient answer to say, that public Penance is meant in these places. The Article makes no distinction. Moreover, public Penance had practically ceased for many centuries before the Reformation, and the term, unless explained otherwise, would naturally be understood of the practice then in ordinary use. Where the distinction was intended, it was carefully specified, as in the Communion Service, which speaks of "public and open" Penance, as distinct from the private ministry. Nor, again, can it be meant that Penance, in its essential features of Confession and Absolution, arose "from a corrupt following of the Apostles;" for we have seen that it is traceable to the purest Christian antiquity and Holy Scripture, as an

¹ Cardwell's Documentary Annals, No. lxviii. The writer in the *Quarterly* endeavours to prove that by *penance* Parker here meant only *repentance*. His argument is, that in Article xvi. "pœnitentia" is rendered "repentance;" and further, that all allusion to the sacrament of penance is excluded from that Article, where, as he supposes, it would surely have been found, if there had been any desire to put it forward. As the Article was composed in English under Parker's supervision in 1571, and his Visitation took place in 1567, the probability, the writer supposes, is the greater.

The Reviewer makes no allusion to the parallel expression in the Thirty-third Article, "reconciled by penance," or to the language of the Communion Service, in both which places, as already shown, the term can only be understood of the sacrament. Moreover, the expression, "remissible by penance," is hardly grammatically reconcileable with his interpretation. "By" implies the means, not the condition. Repentance is but the condition of forgiveness; an act of grace is necessary as the means of forgiveness. Some ministry therefore having this result is clearly intended, not a mere state of mind fitting the penitent for the reception of grace.

unquestioned ordinance of the Gospel. It follows then that not Penance, whether public or private, simply considered, but some incidental doctrines, which had become intimately associated with the term, and formed part of the practical system then prevailing, are repudiated in the Article.

Nor is it without an important bearing on the question, that the old accustomed definition of the component parts of the Sacrament of Penance is preserved in our Prayer Book, in connection with the term itself, the only variation being that a different interpretation is affixed to one of the three parts. Thus in the Exhortation of the Communion Service we read : " Let us return unto our LORD GOD with all *contrition* and meekness of heart ; bewailing and lamenting our sinful life, acknowledging and *confessing* our offences, and seeking to bring forth *worthy fruits* of *Penance*." The italicized words mark the three parts of the process, as determined of old, the only change being in respect of the view taken of satisfaction, which having been identified with the penal view of compensation to the Divine Justice, is here explained to mean the exercise of good works pleasing to GOD. With this single exception the same general sacramental idea, with similar constituent parts, is expressed equally in both definitions.

Moreover, the language of the Article is carefully guarded. It affirms " that there are two Sacraments," but explains the principle of this limitation by adding,—and so distinguishing those specially intended from all others,—"*ordained of Christ our Lord in the Gospel*," as in the Catechism again similarly it is stated, that there are two only "*as generally*," i.e., universally or to all persons in general, "*necessary to salvation*," the distinctive superiority attributed to the two, thus implying the existence of other sacramental ordinances, though not equally necessary. Moreover, the Article says of " the five," not that they are not sacraments, but only not

“sacraments of the Gospel,” a technical expression of which more will be said hereafter.

The sacramental theory on which the Article is based, is more largely drawn out in one of the Homilies, and the passage in which the explanation is given, may fairly be regarded as illustrative of the Article, because the Second Book of Homilies, in which it occurs, was published the same year in which the Articles underwent their final revision.

“As for the number of them, (the Sacraments,) if they should be considered according to the exact signification of a sacrament, namely, for visible signs, expressly commanded in the New Testament, whereunto is annexed the promise of free forgiveness of our sins, and of our holiness and joining in CHRIST, there be but two, namely, Baptism and the Supper of the LORD. For although Absolution hath the promise of forgiveness of sin, yet by the express word of the New Testament, it hath not this promise annexed and tied to the visible sign, which is imposition of hands. For this visible sign (I mean laying on of hands) is not expressly commanded in the New Testament to be used in Absolution, as the visible signs in Baptism and the LORD’s Supper are ; and therefore Absolution is no such sacrament as Baptism and the Communion are. And though the Ordering of Ministers hath this visible sign and promise, yet it lacks the promise of remission of sins, as all other sacraments, besides the two above named do. Therefore neither it, nor any other sacrament else, be such sacraments, as Baptism and the Communion are. But in a general acceptance, the name of a sacrament may be attributed to anything whereby a holy thing is signified. In which understanding of the word, the ancient writers have given this name, not only to the other five, commonly of late years taken and used for supplying the number of the

seven sacraments, but also to diverse and sundry other ceremonies, as to oil, washing of feet, and such like ; not meaning thereby to repute them as sacraments in the same signification that the two forenamed sacraments are. And therefore S. Augustine, weighing the true signification and exact meaning of the word, writing to Januarius, and also in the third book of Christian Doctrine, affirmeth, that the sacraments of the Christians, as they are most excellent in signification, so are they most few in number ; and in both places maketh mention expressly of two, the sacrament of Baptism and the Supper of the LORD. And although there are retained by the order of the Church of England, besides these two, certain other rites and ceremonies about the institution of ministers in the Church, Matrimony, Confirmation of children, by examining them of their knowledge in the articles of the faith, and joining thereto the prayers of the Church for them, and likewise for the Visitation of the Sick, yet no man ought to take these for sacraments in such signification and meaning as the sacraments of Baptism and the LORD's Supper are ; but either for godly states of life necessary in CHRIST's Church and therefore worthy to be set forth by public action and solemnity by the ministry of the Church, or else judged to be such ordinances as may make for the instruction, comfort, and edification of CHRIST's Church."¹

The same careful language is employed here, as in the Article. The "other rites and ceremonies," which "no man ought to take for sacraments," are only excluded from being so called "*in such signification and meaning as the Sacraments of Baptism and the LORD's Supper are.*" Again, "*the number of them*" is limited to the two, only *if* they be "considered according to *the exact signification* of a sacrament." This "exact signification" is determined by a care-

¹ Homily of Common Prayer and Sacraments.

ful definition of the term, which includes not only "a visible sign expressly ordained by our LORD," but also, as the inward grace, forgiveness of sin, sanctification, and also union with CHRIST. It is only when measured by this standard that Baptism and the LORD's Supper alone are considered to be sacraments. They alone correspond with the exact signification of the term, when understood in its technical sense determined by the definition, and therefore they have their peculiar pre-eminence. But the Homily, while confining the term, sacrament, in its fullest, strictest sense, to these two, and allowing that it has been employed more widely to express anything "whereby a holy thing may be signified," recognises at the same time an intermediate class of sacraments, or sacramental ordinances, of which Absolution and Orders are mentioned as instances. These are indeed in one passage of the Homily classed under the common description, "rites and ceremonies," from a jealousy of applying the term, sacrament, to any ordinance falling short of its "exact signification;" but the graces, specifically assigned to them, necessarily involve a sacramental virtue. "Absolution" is affirmed to "have the promise of forgiveness of sin;" and "Orders" to convey the grace of the Priesthood. These are therefore sacraments of the intermediate, or secondary, class.

One sentence only appears to be inconsistent with this explanation. After the statement, that "Absolution hath the promise of forgiveness of sins," it follows within a few lines; "all other sacraments, besides the two above named (Baptism and the LORD's Supper,) lack the promise of forgiveness of sins," words which, literally taken, deny to Absolution this specific grace, and thus expressly contradict the previous statement. Mr. Cooke notices the inconsistency, and suggests an explanation. He supposes the Homilist to be speaking of ordinances which possess visible

signs expressly instituted by GOD to accompany and seal the promised grace, of which he instances Orders, the "laying on of hands" being its "visible sign" according to divine appointment; and then to state that there is "no promise of forgiveness of sin annexed or tied to this visible sign, i.e., in Orders; nor have any other sacraments, except Baptism and the LORD'S Supper, the promise of remission of sins tied to any outward sign." "This," he adds, "undoubtedly must be the meaning of the passage. We cannot suppose the writer of the Homily to be so strangely inconsistent, as to assert within the short space of fifteen lines, that Absolution *has*, and *has not*, the promise of forgiveness of sins. Such a flagrant self-contradiction would make the passage, if not the whole Homily, utterly worthless, and far from 'wholesome doctrine.' Therefore if we wish to uphold the authority of the Homily, the sentence,—'it lacks the promise of remission of sins, as all other sacraments besides the two above named do,'—must be interpreted as meaning, that 'the promise (i.e. in the case of Absolution) is not tied to an outward sign,' i.e. not by divine authority."¹

Mr. Cooke has not noticed the omission of Absolution from the list of secondary ordinances, given at the close of the passage, which may also seem to present a similar difficulty. But apparently this ordinance is included under "the Visitation of the Sick," of which it practically forms the cardinal point, and in regard to which alone that Office

¹ Power of the Priesthood in Absolution, p. 76. Or, as a friend suggests, it may be merely "loose writing." The writer has been dwelling on Absolution, and has only mentioned "Baptism and the Communion to clear what he says about that. Passing on to Orders, he does not dismiss the thought of Absolution, but says that 'the ordering of Ministers' lacks the promise of remission of sins, as all other sacraments (i.e., all other than Absolution, of which he had been saying so much) besides (except also) the two above named, do."

distinction has always been observed between the general and special, or, speaking according to modern usage, the public and private forms of Absolution, the latter being regarded as the more complete application of the ministry. This special or individual form has in all ages been confined to the special ministry of Penance, and though at the beginning administered in public, it was individually appropriated by imposition of hands, and given only after special confession. Our Church in her expositions has been careful to preserve the distinctive character, and so the peculiar virtue, of this individual Absolution. She speaks, e.g., to regular Church-goers, i.e., persons in the habit of receiving general absolutions, of "the benefit of absolution," as something in addition to be obtained only by special confession. She desires her Priests to "absolve" the sick after special confession, though they may be just about to receive the Holy Eucharist in which a general absolution is administered. Again, the Homily, which affirms "ecclesiastical discipline" to be a "note of the true Church," contrasts absolution with excommunication. "CHRIST ordained the authority of the keys to excommunicate notorious sinners, and to absolve them which are truly penitent,"¹ absolution being here evidently viewed in contrast to formal excommunication, and therefore implying a distinctive use, because as the one cannot be exercised in the ordinary services, so neither can the other. Again, the Homily² which describes Absolution as having "the promise of forgiveness of sins," speaks of "the imposition of hands," as its "visible

also that refusal to make compensation, where possible, even on a death-bed, is a hindrance, the leaving it to be done by heirs not being considered sufficient (l. vi. Diss. viii. art. xv.) Other recognised disqualifications are of a similar character.

¹ Second Part of the Sermon for Whitsunday.

² Of Common Prayer and Sacraments.

sign, ordinarily used in the primitive Church, is not ordained in Holy Scripture ; (2) it conveys not the whole, but only a certain measure, of the graces of the New Covenant, being inferior in this respect to Baptism and the Holy Eucharist. But inasmuch as Absolution is represented as having the promise of accompanying grace, i.e., "forgiveness of sins," the Homily implies, that it is a sacrament of a secondary kind, and is thus to be distinguished from those "rites and ceremonies," which are merely symbols of invisible things, not channels of grace.

The Church of England therefore recognises three classes, or grades, of holy ordinances ; (1) the complete sacraments, conveying CHRIST Himself, and in Him all grace, through signs of His own institution—Baptism and the Eucharist alone constituting this first class ; (2) sacramental rites, conveying special grace for certain persons or states of life,—Absolution, Orders, and Confirmation, falling under this head ; (3) ceremonies, or simple symbolic forms of spiritual things, which the Church of her own will uses as instructive and edifying, though not endued with any spiritual gifts. The term, "sacraments of the Gospel," is employed as a dogmatic phrase, specially appropriated to the first class, because they alone contain and convey the full graces promised in the Gospel, and therefore alone satisfy the complete definition.

The whole question thus depends on the meaning attached to the term, sacrament. The history of the term marks successive variations of doctrinal definition. The Fathers applied the term indiscriminately to all visible signs of spiritual things. There was no need of distinction, where there was no controversy ; no risk of confusion, where the living faith of the people preserved the substantial ideas of each separate ordinance. The schoolmen of the middle ages fixed the number and definitions of the seven sacra-

ments, excluding from the list all other visible signs, and classing the seven alone under the one common term. A special reverence has always been attached to the number seven. Seven petitions compose the LORD'S Prayer. The seventh day is the holy day of the week. Seven is the sacred number connected with the work of creation. Seven graces are identified with the Gift of the HOLY GHOST. The Spirit Himself is symbolised by the "seven lamps burning before the Throne." Seven was selected as the number by which to classify the spiritual and corporal works of mercy, and the deadly sins. The same rule was applied to the sacraments, thus constituting a strong line of demarcation, and uniting all in one common system of grace.

But in the lapse of time, evil arose from this classification, just as evil has arisen from the like classification of the deadly sins, it being open to the supposition that others were not deadly,¹ because not included in the list. What were thus classed as alike distinct from all other ordinances, came to be regarded as co-equal one with another. The greater were confounded with the less. The pre-eminent dignity of Baptism and the Eucharist was by the comparison obscured to the popular mind.~ The two only absolutely necessary means of perfect union with CHRIST were thus disparaged. In particular, Penance having become, by the changed law of the Church, as necessary for all persons as Baptism and the Eucharist,—it popularly assumed a place of equal authority. When the full scholastic doctrine of Penance, with its elaborate details stretching into all spheres of life, and determining even the judgments of the world to come,—was developed, it gradually acquired enlarged

¹ It is scarcely to be doubted, that the sin of lying has suffered in estimation, because not classed among the deadly sins, though unquestionably so condemned in Scripture. (Rev. xxi. 8.)

proportions, filling up almost the entire view of religion in its practical bearing on the people. Our Reformers sought to restore the true balance between the several ordinances, and the statements we have been considering are the fruit of this endeavour. But to apprehend these gradations of the Divine mysteries, requires an enlightened and well-disciplined mind. And it is because of the comparative rarity of such an endowment, that evil has arisen from this latter and more exact attempt to classify the sacraments, as before evil arose in an opposite direction from the scholastic mode of statement. The human mind, ever impatient of distinctions, passes rapidly into extremes. And, just as the scholastic view, seeming to equalise the ordinances of grace, operated practically to depress the two greater sacraments, by elevating unduly those of inferior virtue, so the dogmatic exposition of our Reformers, separating off the two greater sacraments, according to their peculiar prerogatives, as alone properly claiming the name of sacraments, has seemed to reduce the lesser sacramental ordinances to the level of mere rites and ceremonies.

But the English Reformers selected a true basis for constructing a dogmatic statement of the means of grace, although it cannot be enforced with the certainty attaching to the Articles of the Creed. Where there are no conciliar decisions of Œcumenical authority to which to appeal, as is the case with regard to the sacraments,—because in earlier days they were too well known to need any formal definition, and, being uncontroverted, required no guarding,—the only recourse is to holy Scripture, the general teaching of the Fathers, and the practice of the earliest antiquity. But doctrinal statements founded on such ground of proof, cannot possess the weight attaching only to articles of faith expressly defined, and sealed, by the authority of the undivided Church. For this reason, among those who, agree-

ing in the use of the same ordinances, and thus practically and essentially one, are yet divided as to their dogmatic definition, the greatest mutual forbearance ought to be cherished, and the utmost latitude of kindly consideration allowed.¹ Differences of view in such a case can hardly but exist. The mere varieties of education, of spiritual life and intelligence, would alone suffice to account for great divergence.

Nevertheless, for all of us who rest in simplicity on the judgments of their own Communion, which, subject to the authority of the undivided Church, is the teacher vouchsafed to us of GOD, sufficient guidance is given as to the specific virtues of these several sacramental ordinances. We are taught in our dogmatic records how to distinguish one ordinance from another, and to fix the relative value of each, with sufficient precision for all practical purposes. The two

¹ The memorable words in which Mr. Keble, at the close of his treatise on "Eucharistical Adoration," has recorded his opinion for our encouragement in the midst of our sad divisions on the question of sacraments, bear materially on the subject matter of the text. "Whether it be that the sacramental system does not require to be doctrinally known in order that its benefits may be received, any more than a person need be able to analyze what he eats and drinks, before he can have it for 'food and gladness,' or for other causes unknown to us, it pleased Providence that the Church should enter on its era of sad divisions, without any œcumenical decision primarily and directly pronounced on the subject. And therefore that portion of CHRIST's truth has not come down to us in distinct dogmatical assertions guarded by anathemas, as the statements concerning the Trinity and the Incarnation have: and it is consequently a more adventurous thing and more largely partaking of the boldness of private judgment, to denounce any person as a heretic in respect of the former class of errors. It is not so plainly our duty to withdraw from his communion, as it would be if he had been distinctly excommunicated by the Church. Materially he may be in heresy, but formally he is not yet so,—a distinction acknowledged by all theologians." P. 169.

pre-eminent sacraments are shown, while containing all grace, to have nevertheless each its distinctive gift ; and the lesser sacraments are also distinguished as to their own special virtues. Thus Baptism is described to be the means of "remission of sins by spiritual regeneration."¹ The Holy Eucharist, viewed in the same distinctiveness, is "the strengthening and refreshing of the soul by the Body and Blood of CHRIST, Which are verily and indeed taken and received by the faithful."² Thus again, Confirmation is "the increase of the HOLY SPIRIT."³ Orders is the communication of "the HOLY GHOST for the Office and work of a Priest in the Church of God."⁴ Matrimony is consecrated "to such an excellent mystery, that in it is signified and represented the spiritual marriage and unity betwixt CHRIST and His Church."⁵ And so, lastly, "Absolution *hath*," i.e., not merely declares or assures, but also *is the means* of fulfilling, "the promise of forgiveness of sins."⁶

¹ Baptismal Service.

² Catechism.

³ Office of Confirmation. Form of Blessing in the imposition of hands.

⁴ The Ordering of Priests.

⁵ Office for Holy Matrimony.

⁶ Homily of Common Prayer and Sacraments.

CHAPTER X.

THE HOMILIES.

ONE passage in the "Second part of the Sermon on Repentance," often quoted as expressing the mind of the Church of England in contradiction of the views here expressed, needs in consequence of the importance attached to it, to be here brought under review. In order to enter into its true meaning, the whole context must be considered. The passage runs as follows :¹

"And where that they (the Roman teachers) do allege this saying of our SAVIOUR JESUS CHRIST unto the leper, to prove Auricular Confession to stand on GOD'S Word, 'Go thy way, and show thyself unto the Priest,' do they not see that the leper was cleansed from his leprosy, before he was by CHRIST sent unto the Priest for to show himself unto him? By the same reason we must be cleansed from our spiritual leprosy, I mean, our sins must be forgiven us, before that we come to confession. What need we then to tell forth our sins into the ear of the Priest, sith that they be already taken away? Therefore holy Ambrose, in his second sermon upon the 119th Psalm, doth say full well, *Go show thyself unto the Priest.* Who is the true Priest, but He which is the Priest for ever after the order of Melchisedek? Whereby this holy Father doth understand that both the priesthood and the law being changed, we ought

¹ Homilies, Oxford, 1844, p. 480.

to acknowledge none other Priest for deliverance from our sins, but our SAVIOUR JESUS CHRIST, Who, being Sovereign Bishop, doth with the Sacrifice of His Body and Blood offered once for ever upon the altar of the Cross, most effectually cleanse the spiritual leprosy, and wash away the sins of all those that with true confession of the same do flee unto Him. It is most evident and plain, that this auricular confession hath not its warrant from GOD's Word, else it had not been lawful for Nectarius, Bishop of Constantinople, upon a just occasion to have put it down. For when anything ordained of GOD, is by the lewdness of men abused, the abuse ought to be taken away, and the thing itself suffered to remain. Moreover these are S. Augustine's words : ' What have I to do with men, that they should hear my confession as though they were able to heal my diseases ? a curious sort of men to know another man's life, and slothful to correct and amend their own. Why do they seek to hear of me what I am, which will not hear of thee what they are ? And how can they tell, when they hear by me of myself, whether I tell the truth or not, sith no mortal man knoweth what is in man, but the spirit of man which is in him ? ' Augustine would not have written thus, if auricular confession had not been used in his time. Being therefore not led with the conscience thereof, let us with fear and trembling, and with a true contrite heart, use that kind of confession which GOD doth command in His Word, and then doubtless, as HE is faithful and righteous, He will forgive us our sins, and make us clean from all wickedness. I do not say but that, if any do find themselves troubled in conscience, they may repair to their learned curate or pastor, or to some other godly learned man,¹ and show the trouble

¹ This expression is sometimes urged as a proof, that our Church, like the Swiss communities, recognises confession to a layman equally as to a priest. There is nothing in any of our Offices to bear out such

and doubt of their conscience to them, that they may receive at their hand the comfortable salve of GOD'S Word ; but it is against the true Christian liberty, that any man should be bound to the numbering of his sins, as it hath been used heretofore in the time of blindness and ignorance."

It was remarked in reference to the passage quoted from the Homilies in the last chapter, that its statements are based on Patristic authority, and that therefore they cannot be at variance with a true Catholic tradition. The same is the case here. It is to S. Ambrose, S. Augustine, and Nectarius, that the Homilist appeals in proof of his doctrine. The whole statement therefore is at least intended to be in harmony with Catholic teaching.

Moreover, the drift of the argument evidently culminates in the closing sentence ; "It is against the true Christian

a conclusion. The expression, "godly learned" man, clearly means a clergyman, and corresponds with "some other discreet and learned minister of God's Word," in the Exhortation before Communion. In both cases the expressions follow in precisely the same relation to the mention of the Parish Priest. "Let him come to me or to some other discreet and learned," corresponds with the injunction of the Homily, "they may repair to their learned curate or pastor, or to some other godly learned man." The expression was commonly used at the time. Thus William Turner, Dean of Wells, a reformer, writes : "If any doubt arise in your conscience, whom ought we rather to go to, to ask counsel, than the *head man* of our souls?" The same writer in another place says : "Let the Bishops appoint *learned men* to hear confessions, and not blockheads, and then the people shall come to the priests by heaps and swarms." "The Old and New Learning." Tracts of Anglican Fathers. Vol. ii. p. 196.

Chillingworth uses the same term in a like connection : "Come no. to him (the spiritual physician) only with such a mind as you would go to a *learned man* experienced in the Scriptures, as one that can speak comfortable quieting words to you, but as to one that hath authority delegated to him from GOD Himself, to absolve and acquit you of your sins." Sermon. vii.

liberty, that any man should be *bound* to the numbering of his sins." That this is the point which the writer seeks to disprove, is evident from the stress laid on the case of Nectarius. Nectarius became Bishop of Constantinople, A.D. 381, and during his Episcopate serious scandal was caused by a case of grievous sin which had been confessed to the Penitentiary, who imposed on the penitent public Penance. This led to the exposure, and eventually, the deprivation, of a deacon, causing, as it was thought, great injury to the Church, by the dishonour cast on one of the clergy. The Novatians were ready to make the most of any exposure of evil within the Church. Nectarius, alarmed, and anxious to prevent the recurrence of such cases in future, abolished the office of Penitentiary in Constantinople, and his example was followed throughout the East. The effect of this measure, as Marshall explains it, was that "the confession of *secret* sins, which gave no scandal, was left thenceforwards to the discretion and conscience of those who had committed them." He says: "They (the people) were still, I presume, at liberty to use the advice of a ghostly counsellor, if they found themselves in want of it, only there was thenceforwards no peculiar officer, whose distinct business it should be to receive such applications, which brings the case pretty nearly to that of our own establishment in the particular now before us."¹

¹ Marshall's Penitential Discipline, pp. 43, 44. Marshall quotes Socrates the historian, expressing his apprehension of the hurtful effects likely to follow the suppression of the Penitentiary; "When Eudæmon (who had advised the suppression) told me what I here have laid before my reader, I presently replied to him, 'Whether your advice will be of use, or detriment to the Church, GOD only knows.' But now I see plainly that it hath given a handle, and an occasion, for discontinuing that wholesome practice of reprehending one another's sins, and for neglecting that Apostolical precept which directs us 'to have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove

The case is perfectly conclusive on the point for which the Homilist adduces it, viz., against a rigid law of compulsory Confession as of divine right, which the Church had no discretionary power to modify. But at the same time the very circumstance of discontinuing the special office, establishes the fact of the existence of private Confession in the early Church. The original public system had been already superseded by the appointment of a Priest specially commissioned to receive private confessions, in order to judge whether the public Penance should be undergone. The change was in suppressing this special authorised receiver of private confessions. It proves the Church's power of modifying its rule regarding Confession, but it equally proves the original use and prevalence of the system.

Again, the emphatic sentences,—“*this auricular confession hath not the warrant of God's word ;*” “*the numbering of sins, as it hath been used heretofore in the times of blindness and ignorance,*”—manifestly imply that, not private confession simply considered, but a particular system of it, was before the writer's mind ; for the “times of blindness and ignorance” cannot mean the primitive ages, and it is the sanction then given to the principle of Confession which is asserted, and has been already proved. The expressions evidently show, that the Homilist is speaking of the system of his day, and of the generations immediately preceding. The complex code of rules, often doing violence to the

them.’” (P. 200.) Hooker (Eccl. Pol. b. vi. c. iv. 9,) describes the matter, as though private confession was cut off by abolishing the Penitentiaries, but his words may be intended only to imply the discontinuance of private confession to a Priest specially authorised, and not such as might be made to the ordinary Parish Priest. Certainly the rule of private confession has continued in the East since the days of Nectarius, equally as in the West. Under either supposition the argument in the text applies.

conscience ; the enforced spiritual influence bound, by the law of the Lateran Council, without the possibility of escape, about the closest relations of domestic and political life ; the dispensations and indulgences extending into the unseen world ; the possible interference with the soul's inner yearnings for unfettered communion with God,—this later system, claiming, as it did, a divine authority, and not anything that we now see, or are likely to see, or which could possibly arise under a discretionary law of Confession, however widely extended, was the idea which the Homilist sought to dislodge from the popular belief.

This conclusion is yet further proved by the fact, that the writer is speaking of what was “not used in S. Augustine's time,” which, as already sufficiently proved, could not be said generally of Confession, whether public or private, for both ministries were recommended by the Saint,¹ though true of the particular system practically in force immediately before the Reformation.

Again, the quotation from S. Ambrose intended to disprove the priestly claim to remit sin, on the ground that it is a disparagement of our LORD's Priesthood, can only be directed against some supposed idea of an absolute power in the Priest. It has no application against the doctrine of a Priesthood which professes only to be the organ and instrument of our LORD's Priesthood ; nor against Absolution, as an act of ministry dependent on the free grace of God. Where the two are viewed as co-operating together, and the one claims only to be subordinate to the other, there is no room for contrast. S. Ambrose is as strong in asserting the efficacy of the commissioned Priest's derived ministry in remitting sins, as he is in denying to him any absolute power. He says, in a passage already quoted : “To the remission of sins *men supply their ministry*,

¹ See references above, pp. 20, 24, 26, 42, 43.

yet do not exercise the right of any power ; for they do not forgive sins in their own, but in the Name of the FATHER, and the SON, and the HOLY GHOST. They pray ; GOD giveth : *the execution is through man*, the richness of the gift is from the power on high."¹

The retort with which the Homilist rebuts the use of such a text as our LORD's command to the leper, "Go, and show thyself to the Priest," to prove a divine obligation to confess to a Priest, as the only means of obtaining forgiveness, showing how the incident really tells the other way, inasmuch as the leper was cleansed before he reached the Priest—is indeed a just repudiation of attempts to strain holy Scripture without reference to its context, in order to support a foregone conclusion. But it is perfectly consistent with, or rather it positively affirms, the belief—already claimed as that of the primitive Church, and therefore our own,—that sin may be forgiven by GOD alone, on true contrition, while yet the Priest's absolution is to be sought in order to convey and attest the gift. It is only inconsistent with the idea of forgiveness being solely and indissolubly annexed to the priestly ministry.

NOTE.

Mr. Benjamin Shaw, in his first pamphlet published in 1858, (Rivingtons,) quotes an extract from Bullinger's letter to Bishop Horn in 1565, as proving that auricular confession ceased to be used in England at the commencement of the Reformation. The extract quoted says ; "Not only will all ecclesiastical order be disturbed, and the number of most absurd ceremonies be increased, but even images (which we know are defended by the Lutherans) will be restored ; the idolatry in the LORD's Supper will be reintroduced, private absolution, and after this auricular confession will creep in by degrees ; and an infinite number of other evils will arise," &c. (Zurich Letters. Parker Society, p. 342.)

¹ S. Ambrose de Spir. Sanc. iii. 18, § 137.

Mr. Shaw adds, "There seems no reason to doubt, that this is unexceptional historical evidence of the state of things at the time ; it was apprehended by this writer that private absolution and auricular confession might creep in. It follows that in the actual state of affairs they could not have been generally in use."

In opposition to this view of the passage, it may be noted that Bullinger writes not from England, but from Zurich ; that he was a Zuinglian minister, and that it does not appear he ever was in England ; and so extreme was the party with which he sympathised, that he, like Calvin, "objected to the surplice, to private baptism, churching of women, the ring in marriage," and other "hurtful and offensive ceremonies," as Calvin afterwards called them. (See Cardwell's Preface to the Two Liturgies of King Edward VI. compared, p. xxxiii., in note.) Bullinger therefore probably received his information from some extreme party correspondents in England, who represented the progress of opinions among themselves as a type of the state of the Church. At this very time "private absolution" was ordered in the Prayer Book to be given whenever desired ; and yet Bullinger speaks of it as an abuse which, he feared, might creep in again.

Mr. Shaw, criticizing the above remarks in his second pamphlet, dwells on the fact that "private absolution" is by Bullinger separated from "auricular confession," as though intended to be connected with some new form of "opening a man's grief, which has been substituted for it," and urges this as a proof of his position against the advocates of Confession. But it has already been shown that "auricular Confession" was a term employed at that time to denote the special Roman system of Confession, including particulars which were rejected by the Reformers, not Confession simply, as it has been viewed in this treatise. It may be freely allowed, therefore, that "auricular confession" was not then in use in England, and yet be true that Confession of some formal kind, though differing from the Roman in certain details, was in use, because private absolution was enjoined. (See Mr. Shaw's "Reply to Certain Strictures," &c., pp. 24, 25.)

CHAPTER XI.

THE COMPARISON OF OFFICES.

EVIDENCE of an important kind intimately bearing on the question before us, is to be derived from the contrast between our own Offices, and others drawn up either about the same period, or subsequently. Such evidence is of the greatest weight in the case of formularies directly derived from our own. Doctrinal variations can in such case be accounted for only by difference of belief, or from the influence of causes less favourable for the assertion of truth. As from the retention of primitive Catholic usages in our own Prayer Book we argue the unbroken transmission of primitive doctrine, so from the absence of such usages in other cases we argue its loss or rejection.

Two instances from the Offices of Puritans and Presbyterians will sufficiently illustrate the marked distinction between our own, and their, views of the ministerial Commission.

The Puritan "Booke of the Forme of Common Prayers" was first printed by Waldegrave of London in 1584, and afterwards thrice reprinted by Schilders of Middleburgh, viz., in 1586, 1587, and 1602. It was for some time largely used by the English Puritans, both at home and abroad. The Ordination Service of this "Booke" has the following order: "He, (the Pastor elect) is to be ordained by the

laying on of the hands of the eldership, with these words pronounced by the minister thereunto appointed : ' According to this lawful calling, agreeable to the word of GOD, whereby thou art chosen Pastor in the name of GOD, stand thou charged with the pastoral charge of this people, over which the HOLY GHOST hath made thee overseer, to govern this flock of GOD, which He hath purchased with His blood.'"¹ The Commission contains no gift of the HOLY GHOST; no claim to the ministry of remission of sins. The only special charge given is the exercise of spiritual government.

The authors of the above form were largely indebted to John Knox's Book of Common Order, which was adopted by the Scotch Kirk, and is equally devoid of any allusion to those mysterious powers which the Catholic Church has ever associated with holy Orders. In this book the Commission is thus expressed; "Prayer ended, the rest of the ministers, if any be elders of that Church present, in sign of their consent, shall take the elected by the hand. The chief minister shall give the benediction as followeth; 'GOD the FATHER of our LORD JESUS CHRIST, Who hath commanded His Gospel to be preached to the comfort of His elect, and hath called thee to the office of a watchman over His people, multiplie His graces with thee, illuminate thee with His Holy Spirit, comfort and strengthen thee in all virtue, governe and guide thy ministry to the praise of His holy name, to the propagation of CHRIST's kingdom, to the comfort of His Church, and finally to the plaine discharge and assurance of thy own conscience, in the Name of the LORD JESUS, to Whom,' " &c."² Preaching is the prominent idea

¹ *Fragmenta Liturgica*, vol. i. p. 18. See *Introductio* p. 9, and Procter on the Book of Common Prayer, p. 81.

Edit. Edinburgh, 1611. Svo. cum privilegio. This extract is quoted from Mr. Maskell's "*Doctrine of Absolution*." Pp. 208, 209.

in sickness being but preparatory to the reception of the Holy Eucharist.

If, as has been supposed, the omission of the clause in question arose from a desire to discourage private absolutions except in case of sickness, a serious imputation would lie against those who procured the omission. For the offer of the "benefit of absolution" in the Exhortation of the Communion Office, still remained as before. According to such supposition private absolutions were to be continued in preparation for Communion, only a slight cast upon the practice by the withdrawal of the previous direction as to the form to be employed. Surely this would be a keeping of the promise to the ear, but breaking it to the heart.¹

To return to the Eucharistic Office. The passage under consideration remained unchanged for upwards of a century. It was under review in 1560, the first year of Elizabeth, when the Prayer Book underwent further revision; again in 1604, in the reign of James I., and lastly in 1661, when "the king issued his warrant appointing a Commission of Divines, who were selected equally from the two parties, to revise the Book of Common Prayer."² No change however was made in the passage under consideration till this last revision. The wording was then condensed, and alterations of considerable importance were made in the

¹ The above paragraph, added in the Second Edition, refers to a criticism on the explanation advanced to account for the omission, by Mr. Shaw. Mr. Shaw instances, as a parallel case, the omission of the direction to anoint the sick. But the cases are not parallel. The omission in the case of unction is complete, the office for anointing being removed, and no allusion left to it in any part of the Prayer Book, while, on the contrary, the direction to give Absolution remains. "A Reply to certain Strictures," &c., by Benjamin Shaw, M.A., 1866, note to p. 26. It is not meant in what is said above as to unction, that omission is to be understood as prohibition.

² Cardwell's History of Conferences, ch. vii.

In the reign of William III., an influential body of the clergy, backed by the King, attempted an alteration of the Prayer Book, with the view of producing "a good agreement between the Church of England, and the Protestant Dissenters." It was the earliest attempt at a comprehension; the first fruits of the compromise sought to be established between religious parties after the Revolution. A Commission was issued to ten Bishops and twenty Divines, "to prepare such alterations of the Liturgy and Canons, &c. . . . as might most conduce . . . to the reconciling as much as possible of all differences." The Commissioners had before them all the objections and demands which had at various times been offered by opponents of the Prayer Book. Among the concessions contemplated was the omission of the mention of private absolution in the Exhortation of the Eucharistic Office. It was proposed that the passage should stand as follows; "let him come to me, or to some other minister of God's Word, and open his grief, that he

opposed by the Reformers. It could only be the special Roman view of the Eucharist, not the Eucharist itself, which had been opposed; and so likewise only the Roman view of Confession, not Confession itself.

Mr. J. C. Chambers, in his Essay (Church and World, note to p. 206, 1867) says, "We may add to this silence on the part of requisitionists in Queen Mary's reign, the fact that Confession and Absolution are not among the subjects discussed in Laud's *Answer to Fisher, the Jesuit*, nor among the charges of indictment preferred against Montague by Morton. Probably Laud did not mention the subject because Bishop White had done so, and established the point that 'Protestants in their doctrine acknowledge that Private Confession of sins, made by penitent people to the pastors of their souls, and particular Absolution or special application of the promise of the Gospel to such as are penitent, are profitable helps of virtue, godliness, and spiritual comfort.' (Conference with Fisher, p. 186.) Similarly Bishop Cosin numbers among points of agreement with the Church of Rome, 'public or private Absolution of penitent sinners.'"

may receive such spiritual advice and comfort, as may tend to the quieting of his conscience, and his better preparation for the Holy Communion." "The benefit of Absolution," which in our Prayer Book is the first object mentioned, is proposed to be omitted. In the "Visitation of the Sick," the term, Confession, as well as the direction to "move" the sick person to it, were to be omitted, and instead a series of questions to be introduced, of which the last was; "Is your conscience troubled with any weighty matter, in which you desire my advice and assistance?" "Advice and assistance" take the place of remission of sins. After these questions was to follow the prayer—"O most merciful God," &c., and then an indicative form of Absolution, but with this characteristic alteration in the form, that instead of, "I absolve thee," should be read, "upon thy true faith and repentance . . . I pronounce thee absolved."¹

The manifest object of these proposals was to remove points of doctrine or practice unpalatable to Nonconformists. No amount of pastoral intercourse, no strictness of outward discipline, would have offended them. The stumbling-block was sacramental Confession with its accompanying promise of remission of sins; and it is therefore clear that according to the judgment both of Churchmen and Dissenters of that day, the words proposed to be omitted or changed, and which still stand in their place, involved its use.

About the same time the Nonjurors separated from the Church. Some of the chief, such as Hickes and Collier, adopted the first Prayer Book of Edward, but the greater number continued to use our present Book, with such changes as they deemed necessary to adapt it to their views. They introduced prayers for the dead, the invocation of the HOLY GHOST, the prayer of Oblation in the Communion

¹ Procter on the Book of Common Prayer, pp. 144, 152—156.

Office, chrism at Confirmation, and the use of oil in the Visitation of the Sick. But they made no change whatever in the parts relating to Confession and Absolution. There can be no question as to the views of the Nonjurors on these points. The fact therefore can be explained only on the supposition, that they regarded the Church of England's existing rule as an adequate expression of the Catholic doctrine.¹

The same conclusion follows from the history of the Scotch Prayer Book. Changes were made with Laud's concurrence in the Communion Office, such as the introduction of the invocation of the HOLY GHOST, with the view of restoring certain Catholic usages, which had been abandoned in the 2nd Prayer Book. But no change, no addition, was made in reference to Confession or Absolution; and this, we may presume, because in his judgment none was needed.

All these facts tell in one and the same direction, and they mark a uniform interpretation put upon our rule both by friends and opponents for upwards of 200 years immediately subsequent to the Reformation.

The comparison with the American Prayer Book, brings down the chain of evidence to the close of the last century. The preface to this book indeed states, that in the following Offices "the doctrines of the Church of England are preserved entire." But the changes which were made are considered to be a subject of great regret by the many faithful Churchmen in the United States; and Mr. Procter, an unexceptionable witness on such a point, has not scrupled to characterise them as being, "some meant to conciliate the new Government, some perhaps admissible as improvements, but others decidedly objectionable and suspi-

¹ See Procter on the Book of Common Prayer.

cious.”¹ At first both the Athanasian and Nicene Creeds were omitted. The article, “He descended into hell,” was erased from the Apostles’ Creed. Only on the strong representations of the English Bishops, who refused on any other condition to consecrate Bishops for the United States, were they reinserted. But even then the Creed of S. Athanasius, as also the sign of the Cross in Baptism, were left discretionary, to be used or not as the minister pleased. Similar changes were made as to the directions given for Confession and Absolution. These changes still remain unaltered, and they are as follows. The rubric before the general Absolution in the Daily Service, “The absolution or remission of sins to be pronounced by the Priest standing,” &c. is changed into “A declaration of Absolution, or Remission of sins to be made,” &c. In the Ordinal, “Receive ye the HOLY GHOST; whose sins ye remit,” &c., is allowed to be omitted, and the Bishop, if he choose, may say instead, “Take thou authority to execute the office of a Priest in the Church of GOD, now committed to thee,” &c. In the Exhortation before Holy Communion, those who cannot quiet their own consciences are invited to come to the minister of GOD, “to receive such godly counsel and advice as may tend,” &c. “The benefit of absolution” is omitted. In the Visitation of the Sick, the Rubric directing the minister to “move” the sick person to Confession, and also the indicative form of Absolution, are expunged, and nothing substituted in their place.²

¹ See Procter on the Book of Common Prayer, p. 163.

² It should be observed, as some, and no inconsiderable, compensation for such serious losses as those mentioned in the text, that happily, through the influence of Bishop Seabury, the prayers of invocation and oblation, omitted in the Communion Office of our own Prayer Book, were reinserted in the American Office, as previously they had been introduced in the Scotch Office. Procter, p. 163.

The different modes of expression which have been noticed in these many forms of service, as either suggested, or actually adopted, are unquestionably indications of a distinct line or school of thought; and, when contrasted with the expressions of our own Offices, they clearly mark the working out of two principles which, from the time of the Reformation, have striven for mastery in the West,—one, preserving the priestly office entire, with its Apostolic exercise of the power of the keys; the other, a reaction, as extreme, from the extreme Roman view of Penance, limiting pastoral intercourse to mere confidential conversation on the side of the penitent, counsel and exhortation on that of the Priest. A constant effort has been made to introduce into our Offices this latter mode of dealing with penitents, as the sufficient and more desirable exercise of the ministerial office. The Church has as uniformly and as steadily resisted it. We may thankfully rejoice in the unvarying success attending such resistance; but at the same time, while our principles have been upheld true and clear, we have to acknowledge with painful regret that the pressure which has hitherto failed to alter the language of the Church, has yet succeeded to a considerable extent in associating it in the minds of our people with a novel and uncatholic interpretation. The desired result has very largely been effected, though not in the way intended. The language of antiquity is faithfully preserved, while a dissenting interpretation has been forced upon it. But a change of language would have been far more disastrous; for many have received the Church's teaching in the Church's sense, and the time may come—is it not even now hastening?—when the rightful interpretation shall be justified of all her children. The pressure for change was successfully resisted so long as the Prayer Book was under revision. And still for those who have ears to hear, and hearts to understand, these records

If a true Catholic penitential system are preserved with sufficient clearness among the many treasures of the marvellous Book, around which the strife for Catholic principles has been waged in England for upwards of 300 years, and yet ceases not,—links preserving us in connection with the Saints of generations long at rest, and with CHRIST, and with His members also on earth in other lands, for visible communion with whom, alas ! we must needs still wait, watching the movements of His Providence, Whose intercession in the heavens ceases not, that “all may be one,” even as Himself and His FATHER “are One.”

CHAPTER XII.

*HISTORY OF CONFESSION IN ENGLAND SINCE THE
REFORMATION.*

IT is often said that the mind and temper of the Church of England are better criterions of her teaching, than can be obtained by theological arguments, or the wording of formularies. But what is meant by the "mind" of the Church? What era in her history is to be chosen, as its standard or type? Is the reign of the Stewarts, or of the Georges, the truest representative? If the former be taken, which of the contending parties are to be considered as the exponents of English orthodoxy, the Bishops who presided at the Savoy Conference, or the Puritan clergy, who protested against their decisions? If the rule which our Church has followed, in ascertaining the mind of the Catholic Church, viz., the teaching of the earliest centuries of her history, be applied to herself, the generations immediately succeeding the Reformation will supply the expression of her mind; and since the Episcopate is the divinely ordained guardian of doctrine, and the Bishops of those times were mainly concerned in constructing our formularies, then their acts and judgments may be taken, as the truest exponents of the actual teaching of our Church during the supposed normal period, or at least the fairest and most practicable approximation to it.

It has already been shown, in tracing the history of those

passages in our Offices which relate to Confession from the year 1547 to 1662, that the changes made subsequently to the issue of the second Prayer Book, uniformly tended to give increased prominence and encouragement to the practice. Such changes were calculated, more than any other acts, to fix the teaching of the Church; for her Service-books are the most authoritative and expressive elements of her actual life. But these provisions were not merely recorded on paper. They were brought to bear on the practice of the Priesthood and the habits of the people, by the injunctions of the Bishops at their Visitations. The "Articles of inquiry" issued on such occasions are not to be regarded as mere expositions of the Bishop's private opinion. Their historical value consists in this, that, where they are in force, they illustrate the then recognised law and custom of the Church.

Reference has been already made to the Visitation Articles of Archbishop Parker, but they need to be here dwelt on more fully. Parker held the primacy of England during the first sixteen years of Elizabeth, and was the chief authority in deciding questions of doctrine during that eventful period. During his primacy, in the year 1567, he instituted a formal inquiry throughout his Province as to the reception and progress of the reformed doctrines. He prefaced his injunctions to his Suffragans by saying; "You shall inquire of the doctrine and judgment of all and singular heads and members of your Church, . . . whether any of them do either privily or openly preach or teach any unwholesome, erroneous, seditious doctrine, . . . or in any other point do persuade or move any not to conform themselves to the order of religion reformed, restored, and received by public authority in the Church of England." Among the chief subjects of inquiry he specifies, as examples of heterodoxy, "that every Article in our Creed, commonly received and

used in the Church, is not to be believed of necessity, or that mortal or voluntary sins committed after baptism be not remissible by Penance ;"¹ thus classing the rejection of the power of the keys in the remission of post-baptismal sin, in closest proximity with the denial of the authority of the Apostles' Creed.

There are extant Visitation Articles, among others, of Overall, Bishop of Norwich, 1619 ; Andrewes, Bishop of Winchester, 1625 ; Cosin, as Archdeacon of York, 1627 ; the Bishop of Peterborough, 1633 ; Wren, Bishop of Norwich, 1636 ; Montague, Bishop of Norwich, 1638.² In all these alike there are inquiries of the following kind : "Whether doth your minister before the several times of the administration of the LORD'S Supper, admonish and exhort his parishioners, if they have their consciences troubled and disquieted, to resort unto him, or some other learned minister, and open his grieffe, that he may receive such ghostly counsel and comfort as his conscience may be relieved, and by the minister he may receive the benefit of absolution, to the quiet of his conscience, and avoiding of the scruple ? And if any man confesse his secret and hidden sinnes, being sicke or whole, to the minister, for the unburthening of his conscience, and receiving such spiritual consolation, doth or hath the said minister at any time revealed and made known to any person whatsoever, any crime or offence so committed to his trust, contrary to the 113th canon ?" "Doth the minister visit the sick ? Doth he upon their confession, repentance, and faith, (being thereunto desired,) absolve them ?"

Provincial canons are still more important. They are the

¹ Cardwell's Documentary Annals. No. lxxviii., s. vi.

² Quoted in Dr. Pusey's Sermon, notes ; Letter to Mr. Richards, p. 117 ; Mr. Cooke's Power of the Priesthood, pp. 108, 109 ; and in Mr. Maskell's Doctrine of Absolution, p. 136.

acts of the Church in Synod. For this reason the 113th canon of 1603 is of material weight in our argument. It relates to presentments for ecclesiastical censure, and states, as a ground of exemption, the laws against breaking the seal of confession. "Provided always that if any man confess his secret and hidden sins to the minister, for the unburdening his conscience, and to receive spiritual consolation and ease of mind from him, we do not in any way bind the said minister by this our constitution, but do straitly charge and admonish him, that he do not at any time reveal and make known to any person whatsoever, any crime or offence so committed to his trust or secresy (except they be such crimes as by the laws of this realm his own life may be called into question for concealing the same) under pain of irregularity."¹

Canons are not enacted except in reference to practices in ordinary use. They are not framed to meet isolated cases. Confession must not merely have been publicly recognised, but sufficiently frequent to affect the clergy in general, if such a provision were felt to be necessary. Still more important is the effect of the 9th Constitution of the Convocation of 1640, though the acts of that Convocation were not confirmed by Royal authority, and so are not formally constituted canons. But they equally show the mind of the Convocation of that day. "For the better settling of an uniformity in the outward government and administration of the Church, &c., this Synod hath now caused a summary or collection of Visitatory Articles

¹ "*Pain of irregularity*, as the canonists tell us, not only doth deprive a man of all his spiritual promotions for the present time, but makes him utterly incapable of any for the time to come ; and therefore it is the greatest penalty, except degradation from the Priesthood, which possibly a clergyman can be subject to."—Dr. Peter Heylin on the Creed, p. 480.

to be made," &c.¹ These Articles are extant, and in them we find the following inquiry : " Have you ever heard that your said priest or minister hath revealed and made known at any time to any person whatever any crime or offence committed to his trust and secresy, either in extremity of sickness, or in any other case whatsoever, (except they be such crimes as by the laws of the realm, &c.)? declare the name of the offender, when, and by whom you hear the same."² The insertion of such an Article in a collection intended to be a perpetual rule for Episcopal and Archidiaconal Visitations throughout England, sufficiently proves both the extent of the practice of Confession at the time, and the supposition of its continuing to be an abiding part of the pastoral care.

A document of considerable interest enables us to carry down the evidence derived from the acts of the Episcopate, to the reign of William III. In the year 1696, two persons of note, Sir John Friend, and Sir William Parkins, were under the sentence of death for conspiracy against the life of the king. Before their execution certain priests gave them absolution, although they had made no special confession. A declaration was immediately issued censuring this proceeding in the following terms :

" For those clergymen that took upon them to absolve these criminals at the place of execution, by laying, all three together, their hands upon their heads, and publicly pronouncing a form of absolution ; as their manner of doing this was extremely insolent and without precedent either in

¹ Synodalia, vol. i. p. 407.

² The Articles were used by Juxon, Bishop of London, in the same year, and probably by no one else, as the Rebellion broke out immediately after. They are reprinted from his copy in the Appendix to the Second Report of the Royal Commissioners on Ritual. See p. 591.

our Church, or any other that we know of, so the thing itself was altogether irregular.

“The rubric in our Office of the Visitation of the Sick, from whence they took the words then used, and upon which if upon anything in our Liturgy, they must ground this their proceeding, gave them no authority, nor no pretence for the absolving these persons ; nay, as they managed the affair, they acted in this absolution far otherwise than is there directed.

“That rubric is concerning sick persons, and it is required, first, that the ‘sick person shall be moved to make a special confession of his sins, if he feel his conscience troubled with any weighty matter, and then after such confession, the priest shall absolve him, if he humbly and heartily desire it.’ But here they absolved, and that publicly, persons condemned by law for execrable crimes, without so much as once moving them to make a special confession of their sins, at least of those sins for which they were condemned. And on the other side here were persons absolved, that did not humbly desire absolution, as feeling any such weighty matter to trouble their conscience. . . . If these ministers knew not the state of these men’s souls, before they gave them absolution, as it is manifest two of them did not . . . how could they without manifest transgression of the Church’s order, as well as the profane abuse of the power CHRIST has left with His ministers, absolve them from all their sins ?

“If they were acquainted with these men’s sentiments declared in their papers, then they must look upon them either as hardened impenitents, or martyrs.

“We are so charitable to believe that they would not absolve them under the former notion, for that had been in effect, sealing them to damnation, &c.

“April 10th, 1696.”¹

¹ Wilkins’ *Concilia*, vol. iv. p. 629.

This declaration is signed by Tenison, Archbishop of Canterbury; Sharpe, Archbishop of York; Compton, Bishop of London; and eleven other Bishops; thus constituting it a formal act of a majority of the Bishops of England, headed by their two Primates.

The Declaration is aimed specially against absolving without previous confession. But it bears, moreover, on several questions which have been under our consideration, illustrating the Church's belief at the time on the following points.

It proves the belief, (1) that absolution is a real ministry of grace committed by CHRIST to His Ministers; (2) that the effect of absolution is a release, not from Church censures, but from sins; (3) that the consequence of an unworthy reception of absolution—they term it, “a sealing to damnation,”—is what could be attributed only to the profane reception of a sacramental ordinance; (4) that these results are applicable to individual personal absolution, given, not in the congregation, but as a private act; (5) that the rule specially laid down by the Church for the sick, is as truly applicable to the whole, the offence being not that they applied the rules of the Office to persons not contemplated by it, but that they misapplied the rule by not requiring previously either confession of sins, or an expression of desire for forgiveness.

We are thus brought to the very opening of the 18th century with the clearest consensus of authority for the use of Confession, as a living part of English Church life; and this continued downward in an uninterrupted line from the Reformation.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE SAME SUBJECT CONTINUED.

DEVOTIONAL books are an additional means of ascertaining the "mind" of the Church. They do not help us to measure the extent of a religious practice, but they mark the recognised constituent elements of a religious life, and the habits of the more devout. It is therefore of great moment to note, that the manuals of devotion, which have survived the 17th century, and were therefore, as we may presume, the most popular in their day, uniformly recommend Confession, and speak of it as in ordinary use.

Thus Bishop Andrewes, in his private thanksgivings, offers praise to God Who "hast given me good hope for the remission of my sins, by repentance, by the works of repentance, and by the power of the holy keys;" and again, because "Thou hast opened to me the gate of hope, when I confessed, and besought Thee by the gift of inspiration, and of the keys."¹ George Herbert says of his "Priest to the Temple;" "In his visiting the sick, or otherwise afflicted, he followeth the Church's counsel, namely, in persuading them to particular confession, labouring to make them understand the great good use of this ancient and pious ordinance, and how necessary it is in some cases."² Andrewes died in 1626, and Herbert in 1632.

¹ Bishop Andrewes's Devotions.

² The Country Pastor, c. xv.

Again, Bishop Taylor in his "Holy Living" says; "Because we may very much be helped, if we take in the assistance of a spiritual guide, therefore the Church of God in all ages hath commended, and in most ages enjoined, that we confess our sins, and discover the state and condition of our souls to such a person whom we or our superiors judge fit to help us in such needs."¹ Connect with this the advice given in the "Holy Dying;" "Whether they be many or few that are sent to the sick person, let the curate of his parish, or his own confessor be among them . . . he that is the ordinary judge cannot safely be passed by in his extraordinary necessity, which in so great portions depends upon his whole life past."² Corresponding directions are given in the "Guide to the Penitent," which is usually bound up with the "Golden Grove," though whether the work of Jeremy Taylor, or of Bishop Duppa; is uncertain: "You are advised by the Church, under whose discipline you live, that before you are to receive the Holy Sacraments, or when you are visited with any dangerous sickness, if you find any one particular sin or more, that lies heavy upon you, to disburden yourself of it into the bosom of your confessor, who not only stands between GOD and you, to pray for you, but hath the power of the keys committed to him, upon your true repentance, to absolve you in CHRIST's Name from those sins which you have confessed unto him." Bishop Cosin in his "Devotions" states it even as one of the "precepts of the Church," "to receive the Blessed Sacrament of the Body and Blood of CHRIST with frequent devotion, and three times a year at least, of which times Easter to be always one, and for better preparation thereunto, as occasion is, to disburden and quit our consciences of those sins that may grieve us, or scruples that may trouble us, to a learned and discreet

¹ On Repentance, ch. iv. s. 9.

² Ch. v. s. 2, § 4.

priest, and from him to receive advice and the benefit of absolution." Jeremy Taylor died in 1667, and Cosin in 1672.

Again, Bishop Patrick, in his "Book for Beginners," advises; "If he still find he is not safe, he must after all advise with some discreet minister of God's Word, as with a spiritual physician; desiring to know what course to take, that he may get the mastery of those unruly lusts which are too hard for him. And when he comes for this ghostly counsel and advice, let him not be ashamed plainly to confess his sins, and to open the whole state of his soul before him whom he consults; relating how and by what means he comes to be thus entangled in the snare of the devil, that he cannot get out of it. Be sure you conquer the loathness you will find in yourself to make this discovery, for fear it disgrace you in his opinion, and convince yourself that you ought the rather to confess your sins ingenuously, that you may take shame to yourself, and lay yourself low in the presence of GOD and His minister." Patrick died in 1707.

Still more remarkable are Chillingworth's (the author of the "Religion of Protestants") strong expressions, if we consider his free handling of Church doctrines. "In obedience to His gracious will, and as I am warranted, and even enjoined by my holy mother the Church of England, expressly in the Book of Common Prayer, in the rubric of Visiting the Sick, . . . I beseech you, that by your practice and use, you will not suffer that Commission which CHRIST hath given to His ministers, to be a vain form of words, without any sense under them, not to be an antiquated expired commission, of no use or validity in these days; but whensoever you find yourselves charged and oppressed, especially with such crimes as they call *peccata vastantia conscientiam*, such as do lay waste and depopulate

Again, Bish^hence, that you would have recourse to your cause we p^rhysician, and freely disclose the nature and assistance^y of your disease, that he may be able, as the cause GOD in require, to proportion a remedy; either to search it joine^dh corrosives, or comfort and temper it with oil.”¹ Chilcor^gingworth died in 1644.

s^r The close of the 17th century preserved the same traditional teaching. John Isham, whose “Daily Office for the Sick” was published in 1694, and re-published in 1696 and 1702, repeats the strongest passages of Bishop Taylor. “Though our Church presseth particular confession to the priest only when the conscience is disquieted with sins of deeper malignity, yet it doth not discountenance the more frequent use of it, and this, too, in so comprehensive a case as to take in great numbers that neglect it; and it is the declared judgment of the learned and pious Bishop Taylor, that confession being useful in all cases, and necessary in some; and encouraged by Evangelical promises, by Scripture precedent, by the example of both Testaments, and prescribed by Apostolical injunctions, and the canons of all Churches and the example of all ages; and taught us by the analogy to the ministerial power, and the very necessities of every man; he that for stubbornness, or any other criminal weakness, shall decline it in the days of his danger, is near death, but very far off from the kingdom of heaven.”

The “Whole Duty of Man,” which appeared before the close of the 17th century, contains the same counsels. Referring to the Exhortation in the Communion Office, it is observed: “This is surely such advice as should not be neglected, neither at the time of coming to the Sacrament, nor any other when we are under any fear or reasons of doubt concerning the state of our souls. And for want of

¹ Sermon. vii. § 14.

this many have run into very great mischief, having let the doubt fester so long, that it hath either plunged them into deep distress of conscience, or, which is worse, they have, to still that disquiet within them, betaken themselves to all sinful pleasures, and so quite cast off all care of their souls.”¹

It is interesting to note, in connection with these extracts from the devotional manuals of the 17th century, instances which have been preserved of the practice of churchmen during the same period.

It is recorded e.g. of Dr. Reynolds, A.D. 1607, who had appeared in behalf of the Dissenters at the Hampton Court Conference, that he, “being absolved before his death, and not being able to speak, kissed the hand wherewith he was absolved;” of Mrs. D. Holmes, in a funeral sermon by Bishop Cosin in 1623, that her “preparation to her end was by humble contrition and hearty confession of her sins, which when she had done, she received the benefit of absolution, according to God’s ordinance, and the religious institution of our Church;”² of Lord Derby, when going into battle with the rebels in 1651, that he desired “Mr. Greenhaugh to read the Decalogue, and at the end of every commandment made his confession, and then received absolution;” of Lady Capel, A.D. 1660, that being absolved “she showed a heavenly comfort and peace after it;” of Lady Anderson, A.D. 1661, being absolved on her deathbed, “to her no little comfort;” of Lord Digby, “desiring of all things in his last extremities to receive the Holy Sacrament, and priestly absolution, according to it’s (the Church of England’s) order and appointment;” of Hooker and Dr. Saravia being “supposed to be confessors to each other,” and that

¹ Of the LORD’S Supper, p. 22.

² Cosin, vol. i. p. 28.

at Hooker's deathbed "after a conference of the benefit, the necessity and safety of the Church's absolution, it was resolved the Doctor should give him both that and the Sacrament the day following ;" of Bishop Sanderson, A.D. 1663, receiving absolution of his chaplain ; of Kettlewell, "requesting and receiving absolution at the hands of Bishop Lloyd, in the form contained in the Office for the Visitation of the Sick ;" of Lady Rachel Russell, A.D. 1683, who "advised her daughters to go to confession, as she did, to Dr. Fitzwilliam, and explained to them how she herself prepared every month for it ;"¹ of Evelyn, in his Diary, March 16, 1685, recording how he had found, among the papers of his deceased daughter, "one to a divine to whom she writes that he would be her ghostly father, and would not despise her for her many errors, and the many imperfections of her youth, and beg of GOD to give her courage to acquaint him with all her faults, imploring his assistance and spiritual directions," to which he adds, "I well remember she had often desired me to recommend her to such a person, but I did not think fit to do it as yet, seeing her apt to be scrupulous, and knowing the great innocency and integrity of her life ;" and lastly, of Bishop Wilson, referring to the death of his wife, in 1705, and thanking GOD for "His mercies to her in the time of sickness, . . . the opportunities of receiving the Blessed Sacrament, the prayers of the faithful, the ministry of absolution, &c."¹

Among those whose advice or example has been here adduced, will be recognised some whose names have become as household words amongst us ; whom an hereditary reverence has honoured as types of the truest English theology,

¹ These anecdotes are collected together mostly by Mr. Stretton in his Preface to the "Visitatio Infirmorum" and the "Guide to the Infirm." Mr. J. C. Chambers, (Essay in "The Church and the World,")

and of that calm, chastened piety, which our Church specially has loved to cherish. Their testimony in favour of Confession is not limited to the probable extent it may have actually attained in their own day, as if that was the measure which they desired. Although the instances given prove an extent of use such as we have now no experience of, men of highest note were at the same period complaining of the neglect into which Confession had even then fallen. Bishop Cosin in the sermon before referred to, speaks of Confession as "a thing that the world looks not after now, as if Confession and Absolution were some strange superstitious things among us, which yet the Church has taken such care to preserve, and especially to be preparatives for death." Again, Dr. Sparrow, in his Sermon preached at Cambridge before the University, on Confession of Sins, and the Power of Absolution, 1637, says: "Confess as the Church directs us. Confess to GOD; confess also to the priest, if not in private, in the ear, since that is out of use, (*male aboletur*, saith a devout Bishop, it is almost quite lost, the more's the pity,) &c."

The importance of these two last extracts can hardly be overestimated, if it be remembered that both Cosin and Sparrow were members of the Royal Commission to whom the last revision of the Prayer Book was entrusted. Their regrets at the prevailing neglect of Confession are clear indications of the object of the changes then made in our Offices, which have been already dwelt upon in detail. They were intended, as such expressions of the mind of their compilers, beside their own internal evidence, show, to give greater definiteness to our Church's teaching, and strengthen the provisions previously made for the encourage-

observes, that "Even up to the time of George IV. this form of godliness was retained, the King's Confessor having always been numbered among the officials of the Royal Household."

ment of Confession, which increasing negligence was rapidly causing to become obsolete.

The neglect of this ordinance, thus deplored by the Divines of the seventeenth century, increased yet further with the decay of spiritual life which marked the succeeding century, till at length Confession not only fell into almost universal disuse, but came to be regarded as a practice detrimental to vital religion, and altogether alien to the system of the Church of England.

We have entered into this tradition, and to many it seems to be our normal state. Yet it cannot be deemed any disparagement to a religious ordinance, if in seeking precedents for its use, we have to pass over the eighteenth century, and recur to days when George Herbert gave the tone to the pastoral ministry, when Taylor shed over the rules of holy living and holy dying the graces of his own beautiful and fervent piety, and Hooker, Sanderson and Bull, lent the weight of their profound learning to sustain the cause of the Church of England. Nor is it in favour of those who now oppose the revived desire for Confession, that the only century since our LORD's death, which in its prevailing practice at all justifies their conclusion, is the one out of the cold torpor of which we are slowly struggling; when the Non-jurors had been lost to the Church; when Convocation was silenced by the State, because of the dissensions between the two Houses; when Wesley could find no place among us, and the largest secessions ever known in England occurred; when the Church cared so little for the growing multitudes still left to her, that the unprecedented passion for Church-building of the last thirty years has failed to recover the lost ground; when with but rare exceptions the dank and disfigured churches were closed from Sunday to Sunday, and the state of our fonts and altars bore unmistakeable and most melancholy testimony to the dishonour

fallen even on the two most indispensable sacraments, the pre-eminent mysteries which communicate the full life of the Incarnation.

Yet even in that dreary period there were not wanting witnesses of mark, who still sustained and transmitted to us the more genuine teaching of the English Reformation. Archbishop Wake, who died in 1737, in his exposition of the doctrine of the Church of England, says; "The Church of England refuses no sort of confession either public or private, which may be any way necessary to the quieting of men's consciences, or to exercising of that power of binding and loosing which our SAVIOUR CHRIST has left to His Church. We have our penitential canons for public offenders; we exhort men, if they have any the least doubt or scruple, nay, sometimes though they have none, but especially before they receive the Holy Sacrament, to confess their sins. We propose to them the benefit not only of ghostly advice how to manage their repentance, but the great comfort of absolution too as soon as they shall have completed it. . . . When we visit our sick we never fail to exhort them to make a special confession of their sins to him that ministers to them, and when they have done it, the absolution is so full that the Church of Rome itself could not desire to add anything to it."¹ Bishop Wilson, who died in 1755, in his *Parochialia*, says; "Absolution benefiteth by virtue of the power which JESUS CHRIST has given His ministers. In short, our LORD having purchased the forgiveness of sins for all mankind, He hath committed the ministry of reconciliation to us, that having brought men to repentance we may in CHRIST's Name, and in the Person of CHRIST, pronounce their pardon. And this will be the true way to magnify the power of the keys, which is so little understood, or so much despised, namely, to bring as many

¹ Gibson's *Preservative from Popery*, vol. iii. p. 31.

as possibly we can to repentance, that we may have more frequent occasions of sealing a penitent's pardon by our ministry. And now, if the sick person has been so dealt with, as to be truly sensible of his sinful condition, he should then be instructed in the nature and benefit of Confession (at least of such sins as do trouble his conscience,) and of Absolution." Later still, Bishop Horne, who died in 1792, says, "a soul when sick or wounded by sin must be recovered and restored by godly counsel and wholesome discipline, by penance and absolution, by the medicines of the word and sacraments, as duly and properly administered in the Church, by the lawfully and regularly appointed delegates and representatives of the Physician of souls."¹ And in our own day Bishop Short, thus completing the catena, has expressed his sense of the changed state of feeling which now claims so untruly to be the genuine teaching of the Reformation. "In the Church of England the confession of particular sins is recommended in the Exhortation to the Sacrament, and the Visitation of the Sick ; but so little are we accustomed to this most Scriptural duty, that their recommendations are frequently unknown and generally neglected."²

¹ Discourse xviii. on Ephes. iv. 7.

² Hist. of the Church of England, ch. vi. § 309.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE LIMITS OF CONFESSION.

IT is often urged that, admitting the encouragement for Confession in sickness and in preparation for Communion, to be such as is here stated, its use nevertheless is intended to be limited to these occasions. According to this view, the two cases specified are regarded as exceptions allowed for definite purposes, while their specific mention is supposed to imply that the practice is excluded in all other cases.

In support of an opposite view the following considerations are to be taken into account:—1. Mr. Palmer has observed that the passage in the Exhortation before Holy Communion “relates not so much to the practice of Confession in general, as to the particular custom of confessing before receiving the Eucharist,”¹ i.e., that it leaves the question of its general application untouched. The circumstances under which the Exhortation is enjoined seem to prove the truth of this remark. The Exhortation is addressed to Communicants. It contemplates only those who are intending to receive, and explains the manner of their preparation. It had a special purpose in reference to the law, then cancelled, of the necessity of Confession before Communion, and was in truth a public announcement of

¹ Mr. Palmer’s Treatise on the Church, vol. i. p. 518; or part ii. chap. vii.

the fact, that although the access to the Blessed Sacrament was now free to all who were not excommunicate, yet Confession was still recommended as a means of obtaining the remission of sins. The Exhortation had no direct reference to non-communicants, or to those who had not at the time the intention of communicating.

2. The Church has another and a special provision for those who are not in living communion with her, who in fact, or by express judgment, are excommunicate. Public Penance, which our Church has so earnestly sought to restore for the sake of the unfaithful members of her body, implied, as we have seen, private Confession as a test of its need, or in preparation for its due performance. To desire to establish the one was therefore by implication to encourage the other, and consequently this case is not excluded by the terms of the Exhortation; and, if this was not excluded, other cases similarly may be left untouched by it. It was intended to meet a particular case, but decides nothing as to cases not alluded to.

3. It has been shown that the directions relating to Confession in the Visitation of the Sick, were directly copied with certain modifications from the ancient Latin Office. The Latin form was in use when Confession was compulsory for all persons throughout life. It could not therefore at that time have been considered to be exclusive; and if before the Reformation it was consistent with a system of private Confession in cases of health, it necessarily could not militate against such a practice after the Reformation. Moreover, a rule for sickness cannot from the nature of the case be limited to sickness. Such a rule is given as a preparation for death. But if for death preceded by sickness, why not also in readiness for sudden death? Why not even in preparation for sickness, lest the soul be then incapacitated for the effort by pain or mental exhaustion? We are taught

to live as those who are prepared to die. The Church's directions for the sick are not less applicable to the whole, if the spiritual danger be the same. A guilty death is not more terrible than a guilty life, except that the latter leaves space for repentance ; and how to provide for a true repentance is the question at issue.

Commentators on our Office for the "Visitation of the Sick" have taken this enlarged view of our Church's meaning. Wheatley on the "Visitation of the Sick," says : "We may still, I presume, wish very consistently with the determination of our Church, that our people would apply themselves oftener than they do to their spiritual physicians, even in the time of their health, since it is much to be feared, they are wounded oftener than they complain, and yet through aversion to disclosing their sore suffer it to gangrene for want of their help who should work the cure. But present ease is not the only benefit the penitent may expect from his confessor's aid ; he will be better assisted in the regulation of his life, and when his last conflict shall make its approach, the holy man, being no stranger to the state of his soul, will be better prepared to guide and conduct it through all difficulties that may oppose."¹ Thus also Comber ; "We wish that the people even in time of health (when their conscience is troubled with some great sin, and their souls are assaulted with a violent temptation) would come and make their case known to their spiritual physician, to whom the Fathers elegantly compare the Priest in this case. . . . But if we have omitted this before, we have more need to send speedily for God's ministers in our sickness."

Devotional manuals, and Visitation articles, previously quoted, take the same view of the case. Thus, e.g., George Herbert's recommendation of Confession was "in visiting the sick or otherwise afflicted." Jeremy Taylor's rule was,

¹ Wheatley on the Book of Common Prayer ; ch. xi. sect. iv. § 4.

that "what is necessary to be done in one case, and convenient in all cases, is fit to be done by all persons."¹ Chillingworth's advice is, "Whosoever you find yourselves charged and oppressed."² The "Whole Duty of Man" enjoined the not neglecting it, "neither at the time of coming to the Sacrament, nor at any other when we are under any fear or reasons of doubt concerning the state of our souls." Again, the Visitation Articles previously quoted speak of Confession made, "in any case whatsoever," "being sick or whole," "at any time."

It is sometimes assumed, that even allowing Confession to be thus freely open without any limit but what the need of souls and the directions of pastors determine, yet that the habitual and periodical practice of it is condemned at least by implication by the spirit of the Church of England's teaching.

In regard to this question it is to be observed, that not the expedience, but the lawfulness, of such a use of Confession, is here the point at issue. And as to this the arguments employed to disprove any limitation as to special occasions, seem equally applicable to the question of frequency. Habitual and periodical Confession had been the custom previous to the time of the Reformation. The idea was implanted in the mind of the people; unless expressly prohibited, it would naturally have seemed still open to those who desired to continue their former habit. The compulsory rule was expressly repealed; nothing, however, was ruled with the view of limiting the frequency, or defining the period. It is indeed scarcely conceivable that at such a crisis, in the violent collisions of first principles involved in the Reformation, the Church could have undertaken to consider so delicate and abstruse a question; nor could the Church at any time enter upon such a question

¹ Holy Dying, ch. v. sect. 3, n. 16.

² Sermon vii. § 14.

without a degree of interference with individual liberty that would universally be esteemed vexatious and intolerable. It would be felt, that if Confession were made a discretionary rule, its application and extent must also be left to discretion. True freedom on such a point must act both ways, equally in behalf both of those who reject, and those who desire it.

Our devotional writers, who have been quoted, evidently thus viewed this question. The "Guide for the Penitent" gives, as a rule, "that for the frequency of doing this you are to consult with your own necessities." Cosin, as to the time of so doing, adds, "as occasion is." Patrick, in advising recourse to a "spiritual physician," says; "To him it will be necessary to repair on all occasions, that he may instruct and teach you in that whereof you are ignorant, or awaken you when you are sleepy, or refresh and cheer you when you are weary, or cure you when you are sick or ill at ease, or resolve you in your doubts, or quicken your dulness, or bridle your fervour."¹

Moreover, the term, "Confessor," commonly used by Jer. Taylor, and "his own Confessor," beside "the Curate of his Parish;" and by Isaac Walton, in reference to Hooker and Saravia; and even by Wheatley in a formal commentary of the last century;² the kindred terms, "ordinary judge," "spiritual guide," "physician," "private guide and judge," "ghostly father," (as by Evelyn's daughter,) used indifferently in passages previously quoted, and Wheatley's reason just given for Confession, "in health, because the holy man being no stranger to the state of the soul, will be

¹ Advice to a Friend, sect. 13, "When we are much indisposed to advise with our spiritual physician."

² "Present ease is not the only benefit the penitent may expect from his Confessor's aid." C. xi. sect. iv. § 4. See Jer. Taylor's Holy Dying, chap. v. §§ 2, 4.

better able to guide and conduct it through all difficulties,"—all tend to the same conclusion.

The same reasoning applies to the question, whether habitual direction is sanctioned by our Church. Direction, if viewed simply in its first principles, is implied in "ghostly counsel and advice." The extent or duration of such counsel and advice is of necessity dependent on the circumstances of each individual case; and direction rightly understood, is but ghostly counsel and advice become habitual. The evils popularly associated with the idea of direction, and ordinarily intended to be condemned under the term, viz., the substitution of the priest's judgment for the true acting of the conscience of the person under his influence, and the consequent loss of all sense or obligation of personal responsibility,—are but the abuse of a most sacred trust. The true object of direction is not to preserve a hold on the mind of the penitent, and habituate it to lean on authority overruling its own powers of action by minute details of rule, but rather to develop true principles, and awaken dormant energies within the soul, so as to enable it to judge and act more healthfully for itself. The term, "director," is recognised by our devotional writers, and is used indifferently with the term, "guide." The former term may appear to imply a disregard of the free action of the conscience not intended in the latter, but the difference arises only from incidental abuses not necessarily identified with it. Direction in its true and original sense means such help as may strengthen and assist the soul in the use of its renewed powers, not destroy them; quicken its sense of responsibility, not paralyze it. It is frequently urged, that such a trust of one man's soul to the guidance of another, is in itself a sufficient condemnation of the system. Such objectors, however, seem to forget, that

under any system of pastoral intercourse unreserved communications on the one side and authority in advising on the other, are always supposed. The mere fact of going to a minister of God for guidance as to the state of one's soul, implies in itself a belief in a Divine Commission and a special prerogative. To a devout mind seeking such aid, nothing but some very clear witness of the conscience, irreconcilable with the counsel given, could warrant a resistance to such counsel. There is doubtless greater solemnity and a greater claim to obedience in the act of Confession, because of its sacramental character, than in any other kind of pastoral intercourse; but a priest in confession does not arrogate to himself infallibility. He claims but a special knowledge and fitness, aided by experience and grace promised to his ministry. The fear on which the objection rests, arises no doubt from the secrecy which surrounds Confession; but it should be remembered that the remedy is in the penitent's own hands, the inviolability of the seal of confession being for the security of the penitent, rather than that of the priest. Moreover the liability to err, besetting all human instrumentality, does not ordinarily lead men to reject or disparage the use of similar aid in other cases. A medical or legal adviser may err or abuse his trust, but we do not on this account cease to repose such confidence in our need. The consequences of abuse in the case of a soul are indeed far more eventful than in the case of the body, or of worldly goods; but on the other hand it is not unreasonable to expect that credit for faithfulness may be given to those who are specially set apart and ordained of God as men approved for their ministry; nor is it likely that cases of abuse of so sacred a trust, should such arise, could continue long without a remedy. Our habits of free inquiry and discussion, and above all, the liberty given to us, whether to go, or not to go, to confes-

sion, and to seek any priest, according to our own choice, are securities which in our case at least must tend to correct the evils, if such there be, which are apprehended. Nor is it reasonable to suspect evil, till it is proved, or, if proved, to reject a means of grace until a remedy for the evil is shown to be hopeless. Even if some imaginary risk is to be run, the gain on the other side is to be weighed also. And to this must be added the consideration, that the objection if carried to its legitimate conclusion, would close up the avenues to all unreserved confidential intercourse between a priest and his people, or even between man and man. For not in Confession only are the secrets of the soul divulged, yet the deepest secrets are precisely those which often are most difficult to reveal to another most closely knit to oneself in ordinary daily intercourse. It is surely better that such secrets should be reposed in one set apart for the very end, and under authority, as well as specially interested in preserving his "good report among all men," rather than trust to chance and promiscuous advisers. Still worse surely would it be that such secrets should remain unrevealed till death, when they may be sins crying aloud for judgment.

The chief strength of the objection without doubt lies in the jealousy of interference with domestic life. Will not such a system divide husband and wife, parent and child? The importance of such a question cannot possibly be exaggerated. But an answer is to be found in a fair and unprejudiced view of the object which is sought to be attained. Confession professes to be, and, when rightly used, is, the remedy, not the foment of evil; and therefore the furtherance, not the marring, of domestic peace. It is a matter in which the ultimate test must be sought in practical experience. It cannot be decided by *a priori* prejudice. The question can only be settled by considering whether those

wives and children who go to confession become better or worse, more or less faithful, in their respective duties ; and to this test its advocates are content to leave it.

It may still be urged, whether in such a momentous trust, there ought not to be a selection of certain experienced priests, specially commissioned and authorised for its exercise. No doubt much may be said in favour of such a selection. But this is a question for the Church, not for individuals : we can only act according to the rules laid down for us. Our system is one that encourages freedom and individual discretion, and this spirit has determined other cases beside the one in question. Difficulties already touched upon have possibly hindered our Church applying a stricter discipline ; or it may have seemed most consistent with her principles, and least open to evil, to entrust to her children, where the parish Priest is either hindered by circumstances, or unequal to the charge, the responsibility of choosing their own spiritual advisers, rather than commission certain Priests of her own choosing, and binding all to have recourse to them alone. "Let him come to me, or some other," &c. It is certain that in thus expressing her mind, she has voluntarily and designedly laid the whole responsibility on the people ; and, both in the case of Confession, and that of "counsel and advice," has allowed the choice of the person to be consulted, and the frequency of the act, to be determined freely according to the circumstances of each individual case.¹

¹ These remarks on the question of the trust to be reposed in a spiritual guide, inserted in the second edition, were occasioned by the adverse criticism of the writer in the "Quarterly." The Reviewer's objection rests partly on the supposed impossibility of finding men fitted to exercise such a trust, partly on the idea of its tendency to place an arbitrary power in the hands of the clergy, and establish an intolerable interference with family life, pp. 92, 93. Experience alone

The trite saying, commonly urged as if settling the question of frequency, or of the use of Confession at all, that it is the exception, not the rule; the remedy of disease, not the food of life,—only illustrates the nature of the ordinance, and defines nothing. Confession is essentially the exceptional and remedial element of Christianity. The Holy Eucharist, prayer and self-discipline, teaching and divine illuminations, are the proper rule, and ought to be the sufficient food of the life of the Baptized. Their intended effect is to refresh and strengthen, increase and perfect, by a progressive advance, the regenerate nature in its eventful course, till it attain its consummation of bliss in conscious union with GOD and CHRIST. More ought not to be needed. But because such grace is often hindered, or may decay, or even be lost, the remedial ordinances are given to renew the faded, or debilitated, or departed life. If the analogy of medicine were consistently carried out in respect to Confession, it would lead us far beyond what they who commonly urge it can intend. To the greater number medicine is a periodical necessity; to many an unceasing stay; few, if any, but must at some period of life have recourse to it. Nor again is it true to say, that Confession is to be identified with weakness, or an inferior standard of spiritual attainment. In a leading article of the *Guardian*, which appeared in the course of the late discussions on the subject of Confession, the writer, while strongly criticising the abuse to which he supposes Confession to be liable, vindicates it from this popular reproach. "We cannot," he says, "shut our eyes to the silly exigent

can prove the truth or fallacy of such assertions. The advocates of Confession must be content to wait till time has shown the real result of the work which they desire to encourage, meanwhile firmly assured that it is the order of the Church, intended, at least, for the good of souls.

egotism, the unmanly shrinking from responsibility, the negligence of ordinary ties, which causes, [? may 'cause] as it is caused by, the resort to a confessor. But looking to the iron characters which abound in the Roman Church, it is childish to suppose a constant connection between weakness and the confessional; or to doubt that the unceasing self-examination which that institution involves, its periodical self-abasement, and the ever present certainty that weak or sinful indulgence must soon be followed by that abasement,—must have made many a weak man strong, and have had a great share in forming that almost unparalleled mixture of determination with obedience, of pliancy with strength, which shines in the great characters of the Roman Communion.”¹

As experience shows that spiritual strength may be the fruit of Confession, so there is nothing to prove that the desire for its use necessarily presupposes spiritual inferiority. Neither sin nor weakness in themselves lead to a desire for relief, but a sensitiveness to the one or the other. And as sensitiveness to sin may be the result and mark of a growing sanctity, so consciousness of weakness may arise from deeper effort after greater holiness. Probably the objection to habitual confession has reference to its use, as a mere rule, without any sense of immediate need, so as to make it a matter of routine, under external authority, and not an aid to meet a real want. To this it may be said that it is scarcely possible to conceive confession continuing under such circumstances; it would become intolerable both to Priest and Penitent. Confession could not be kept up except on the supposition of the continued desire for relief, or self-discipline. But our Church's rule of freedom as to confession is a safeguard against such a risk. Where con-

¹ This passage was copied at the time of its publication, but the date of the number was omitted to be taken down.

fession is compulsory, it may tend to formality in indevout and careless persons. With our free system to come to confession is in itself a proof of some real desire.

A more real scruple as to any frequent use of Confession is derived from the ancient rule of Penance, which yet, as we have seen, is claimed as its prototype and authority. The ancient Penance was ordinarily allowed but once in a lifetime, and this only for very grievous sins. How then can this custom be pleaded as the warrant for a system which allows constant recurrence at discretion to the same ministry, by the same persons, and after even the comparatively lighter forms of sin? To this it may be answered, that the ancient rule implied only that Penance could not be twice allowed, not that Confession might not be repeated. Public Penance might extend over several years, and repeated private confessions might be made during its course. Or private Confession might be made, and no public Penance be enjoined. It might be made in the case of sins, to which the Penance was inapplicable. There was no restrictive rule as to the use of Confession, as there was to that of Penance. The most rigid adherence therefore to ancient precedent would only limit the use of Absolution in the case of the more grievous sins.

Moreover, there appears to have been in the earliest ages an amount of personal guidance and direct teaching, of which there is no parallel in the present day; and the assistance thus of old given, is now sought through Confession. An active public discipline was then exercising a constant influence on the inner life, which the Church in the present day can supply only through her private ministrings. The difference of circumstance between our own and those former ages, is therefore too great to admit of a conclusive argument being drawn from such a comparison.

Moreover, it is clear from the many statements in our formularies already considered, that our Church at the Reformation accepted the modern usage of Confession, excepting only the particular points in its use which it especially excluded. It might have restricted its penitential system to the ancient laws of public Penance; but manifestly it did not do so. It rejected the idea of compulsion, and certain other details of the pre-Reformation system, but otherwise it sanctioned the later use. Experience had justified the new principle, as suitable under the existing circumstances of society and the Church. The loving readiness to apply at need in any case her healing ministry, seemed in her judgment the truest and most practical means, especially during the abeyance of the ancient discipline, "to comfort and help the weak-hearted, and raise up them that fall." And all acknowledge that the Church has power from God thus to adapt her ministry of reconciliation to the changing circumstances of the times. "The Church," says Hooker, "is not denied to have authority either of abridging or enlarging the use and exercise of that power."¹

Notwithstanding however this undoubted sanction and encouragement given to Confession in the English Church, there is a principle, lying deep in her system, which more or less modifies and restricts its use among us, and which ought therefore fairly to be considered in connection with the foregoing arguments. One object sought in the reconstruction of our Offices was to develop and cherish the soul's secret communion with God. Compulsory confession, and the prevailing idea that remission of sin could not be had without it, must have tended to introduce con-

¹ Eccl. Pol. b. vi. iv. 15. The passage is quoted again with its context in the following chapter.

fused views as to the relative importance of confession to God and to the Priest. The former would often be sunk in the latter. The subjective life of repentance must have suffered from the force of the objective system, which constrained it. That there was ground at the time for special care in this matter can hardly be disputed, if it be considered how passages of Scripture relating to repentance were then interpreted to mean Penance, and allusions to Confession necessarily to mean confession to a Priest.¹ This conviction actuated our Reformers in many of the changes, introduced into our Offices, the object of which was to bring into increased prominence the idea of confession to God alone, not in order to disparage sacramental Confession, but to restore the balance which, as they thought, had been disturbed. With this view the general confessions were enlarged, deepened in tone, and made

¹ The following instances may be taken as examples. Thus μετανοείτε, which we rightly translate, "repent," is in the Vulgate, pœnitentiam agite; in the Douay version, "do penance." It is most remarkable that the following texts are alleged by the Council of Trent, in proof of the Divine necessity of Penance. "Unde Propheta ait, Convertimini, et agite pœnitentiam ab omnibus iniquitatibus vestris; et non erit vobis in ruinam iniquitas. (Ezech. xviii. 30.) Dominus etiam dixit, Nisi pœnitentiam egeritis, omnes similiter peribitis. (S. Luc. xiii. 3.) Et princeps Apostolorum Petrus peccatoribus Baptismo initiandis pœnitentiam commendans, dicebat, Pœnitentiam agite et baptizetur unusquisque vestrum. (Act. ii. 38.)" Sess. xiv. cap. 1, de pœnitentia.

Mr. Maskell adduces a remarkable instance of this mode of interpretation from Wilkins' Concilia, tom. i. p. 579. "The Council of Durham, in 1223, thus interpreted the text, 'Let a man examine himself, and so let him eat,' &c., as enforcing Confession. 'Qui manducaverit carnem Domini et biberit sanguinem ejus indignè, reus erit corporis et sanguinis Domini: terrere nos potest terribilis hæc sententia. Propter hoc audite, filii carissimi, consilium Apostoli, quod tale est; probet autem semetipsum homo unusquisque per confessionem mundans et sanctificans, et sic de pane edat et de calice bibat.'"

congregational, instead of being said, as before, by the Priest and assistants only.¹ The daily Exhortation teaching, that, "although we ought at all times humbly to acknowledge our sins before GOD, yet ought we most chiefly so to do, when we assemble and meet together;" the first Exhortation to Communion directing the people "wherein (they) shall perceive themselves to have offended, either by will, word, or deed, there to bewail (their) own sinfulness, and confess (themselves) to Almighty GOD;" and generally the use of the mother tongue in all our services, thus associating the people with the Priest in the acts of his ministry, —all tended to encourage and develop the idea of the soul's secret and independent communion with GOD. Nor is it possible to calculate to what extent the spiritual life of England has been quickened and sustained by the constant use of such exhortations and such prayers, accompanied with all the magic power of a native language; nor how many thousands and tens of thousands, who would never have confessed to a Priest, and perhaps only been driven further from GOD by the attempt to constrain them to it by force, have been thereby led to humble confession before their "FATHER Which seeth in secret."

This principle of secret confession to GOD alone is indeed so strongly implanted in us, that to many, and those often

¹ In the "Ordinary of the Mass," according to the Roman Office, the confession is as follows: "Confiteor Deo omnipotenti, Beatæ Mariæ semper Virgini, beato Michaeli Archangelo, beato Johanni Baptistæ, sanctis Apostolis Petro et Paulo, omnibus Sanctis, et vobis, fratres: quia peccavi nimis cogitatione, verbo et opere, mea culpa, mea culpa, mea maxima culpa. Ideo precor, &c." The assistants then repeat the same confession for themselves. In the Sarum Missal, the confession closely corresponds: "Confiteor Deo, Beatæ Mariæ, omnibus Sanctis, et vobis; quia peccavi nimis cogitatione, locutione et operè; mea culpa; precor sanctam Mariam, omnes sanctos Dei, et vos, orare pro me."

most truly devout, it appears irreconcilable with confession to a Priest. They have tasted the blessedness of communion with God in loneliness; they have felt the mysterious stay of a spirit casting the burden of its life on the Invisible, "where none was nigh, save God and one good angel;" and they are jealous of this secret joy. They fear lest through any created intervention, even one ordained of God Himself, their clear apprehension of His personal sympathy and support should be disturbed, or their own motives become less pure and simple. One cannot too highly esteem such scruples. Nor could there be any stronger proof that Confession was acting unhealthfully, or was unsuitable under the circumstances, if it were found to interfere with, nay, if it did not rather foster and deepen, this free and childlike intercourse of the Divinely-quickenened spirit with its God. Experience proves that various minds, and the same minds under various circumstances, take very different views as to the use of Confession. Our Reformers allowed for this variety. They willed that none should judge another, as though one could necessarily be a rule to another, in such a matter. But on the other hand our Reformers seem never to have contemplated any incompatibility between secret confession to God, and confession to a Priest. Otherwise they could not have encouraged sacramental Confession, except in the most urgent cases. They could not have advised its use in cases of mere "scruple and doubtfulness." The popular teaching of our own day would rather have been, that such lesser trials should be overcome by the soul's own effort; and this may often be sound advice in cases of the kind. But our Church suggests the use of Confession, not merely if the conscience be "troubled with any weighty matter," but also in these lesser spiritual difficulties. So far therefore from contemplating any incompatibility between the two, our Reformers

must have considered that even in these latter cases Confession to a Priest may, if rightly guided, tend to remove hindrances, and so prepare the way for more peaceful communion with God.

The only real settlement therefore of any such questions as to the use of Confession according to the mind of the Church of England, is to be found, not in any restrictive rule, still less in any jealous disparagement or distrust of a Divine ordinance, but in moral considerations, in the balance of the two forces, which she seeks to develop in harmonious co-operation, the one or the other acting with the greater power according to the special distinctive needs of individual souls.

While, however, it is thus clear that among us Confession is left free, and its application discretionary, there are considerations, derived from the general witness of the Church, and the practice of those whose saintly lives have entitled them to special authority in such a question, which cannot fail to weigh with all thoughtful and earnest minds. The Church of England has never shown in any of its public acts, or formal decisions, a desire to set herself against the mind of Catholic Christendom. It is therefore a material consideration, that not only the Roman Communion, according to its own rule, but the Churches of the East also, though not by compulsory rule, yet by settled universal custom, have alike been led to the practice of periodical Confession, as a help to the advancement of the spiritual life, as well as a means of remission of sins; the testimony of those whom the Church reckons among her most distinguished saints, in both communions, bearing unmistakable testimony, by word and by example, to its great value in this respect. It has been also shown, how those among ourselves whose character for holiness has embalmed their memories with a very special reverence for our own guid-

ance, have agreed in the assertion of the same truth. Therefore from all quarters comes a traditionary voice, speaking one and the same deep conviction, as the interpretation of secret guidings of the Spirit of God, which cannot but have a real weight even where a free discretion and a mutual kindly forbearance as to difference of view and practice, are secured to us.

It may be added, that it is not difficult to see how Confession may benefit those who do not need it for the assurance of the remission of deadly sin; but rather look to it as an aid in the onward progress of a life ever reaching forth unto God. To a sincere mind it provides an important rule of discipline, a check and stimulus calculated to act on faulty tendencies and variable dispositions, over and above its efficacy in the unravelling of entangled skeins of evil or dangerous thought or temptation, and the detection of secretly lurking or imperfectly discerned motives and principles. It also involves a surrender of the natural independence of the heart, which is generally the chief barrier to the soul's progress in bringing "every thought into obedience to CHRIST." These effects would follow from even the natural working of such a searching process as Confession implies. But a yet deeper influence accompanies the act in its relation to the kingdom of grace and the powers of the world to come, through the blessing assured to the priestly ministry,—an influence aiding the soul's own self-discipline, while it seals the promised forgiveness, and investing the exercise of repentance with a sacramental power and assurance. A life thus guided may most surely rest in the consciousness of being in harmony with the entire sacramental system which, through the intervention of a ministry ordained for the special purpose, represents the Presence, and conveys the manifold gifts, of CHRIST to His elect.

CHAPTER XV.

HOW FAR CONFESSION IS NECESSARY.

HOLY Scripture gives no definite indication of the special sins, which need to be reconciled by the individual application of the power of the keys. The ministry was ordained indefinitely for the remission of sins, without distinguishing the cases to which respectively the general, or the individual, ministry of reconciliation applies. It was left to the guidance of the Spirit within the Church to determine its application. We have seen, however, that the same law which regulates the use of the individual ministry, determines at the same time the use of Confession, because the individual ministry of reconciliation involves Confession; and an uniform rule has guided the practice of the Church from the beginning on this momentous question.

It has been sufficiently shown that, where no deadly sin burdens the conscience, the individual ministry of reconciliation, and so Confession, has always been left as a question of discretion and spiritual experience. The Church of Rome has never considered Confession to be necessary in such cases, except as a rule of discipline, arising out of the canonical law which obliges every one to confess once at least in every year. The Council of Trent decreed, that "venial sins, i.e., such as do not exclude from the grace of God, and into which all fall more or less frequently, may remain unconfessed without fault, and be expiated by many other remedies,

although to confess them is right and profitable.”¹ The proper effect of Confession in such cases is the advancement of the spiritual life, the increase of humility and contrition of heart, of the knowledge of sin and faults besetting the character, of more earnest carefulness and self-control, of deepened peace and more restful communion with God. But, on the other hand, as all spiritual exercises, however valuable, may be abused, so Confession may become the occasion of scrupulosity, of self-consciousness or perplexity, and thus, a hindrance to grace; it may be used merely for temporary relief without any purpose or endeavour after a higher life, and so become even an encouragement to sin, or at least an alleviation of the sense of fear and self-reproach attending it, and thus a means of self-deception. Whether therefore Confession be beneficial under the circumstances to one living in a state of grace, although with more or less of imperfection; and if so, at what periods of life, and with what frequency, it should be used,—are questions that need to be determined by a wise and discriminating judgment, no constraint or definite rule being imposed by the Church.

But a clear and wide distinction has always been preserved between those lesser sins, which only hinder the perfectness of a true and on the whole a consistent course, and sins burdening the conscience as of a deadly character.²

¹ “*Venialia, quibus a gratia Dei non excludimur, et in quæ frequentius labimur, quanquam rectè et utiliter, citraque omnem præsumptionem, in confessione dicantur, quod piorum hominum usus demonstrat, taceri tamen citra culpam, multisque aliis remediis expiari possunt,*” &c. Sess. xiv. cap. v. de Confessione.

² Jeremy Taylor thus expresses his mind as to our Church’s view of this distinction: “Although we do, with all the ancient doctors, admit of the distinction of sins mortal and venial, yet we also teach that in their own nature and in the rigour of the Divine Justice, every sin is damnable and deserves GOD’S anger: . . . yet by the Divine mercy

The strong, urgent appeals of the primitive Fathers for submission to Penance, as the appointed means of obtaining the remission of more grievous sins, the original rule limiting such necessity to the more extreme cases of this class, have already been noticed. The same distinction has been shown to have prevailed uniformly in all ages. This tradition has been preserved among us. Our best devotional writers and guides of souls have recognized this distinction, though without specifying *nominatim* the sins for which such remedy is necessary. But they are of one mind in affirming, that for such sins as peril the grace of Baptism, and hinder communion with GOD, the individual ministry of the power of the keys, and therefore Confession, is the ordinary means of reconciliation, while for other cases it is to be recommended as more or less expedient.

Bishop Cosin, commenting on the Office for the "Visitation of the Sick," says: "The Church of England, howsoever it holdeth not confession and absolution sacramental, (that is made unto and received from a Priest,) to be so absolutely necessary, as without it there can be no remission of sins, yet by this place it is manifest, what she teacheth concerning the virtue and force of this sacred action. The confession is commanded to be special, &c. . . . Venial sins that separate not from the grace of GOD, need not so much to trouble a man's conscience. If he hath committed any mortal sin, then we *require* confession of it to a Priest."¹ Bishop Montague more fully to the same effect says; "We

and compassion, the smaller sins which come by surprise, or by invincible ignorance, or inadvertency, or unavoidable infirmity, shall not be imputed to those who love GOD, and delight not in the smallest sin, but use caution and prayers, watchfulness and remedies against them." Dissuasive from Popery. Sect. vi. Heber's Ed. vol. x. p. 209.

¹ Commentary on the Offices of Common Prayer. First Series, vol. v. p. 163. Library of Anglo-Catholic Theology.

refuse it to none, if men require it, if need be to have it ; we urge and persuade it in extremes ; we *require* it in case of perplexity, for the quieting of men disturbed in their consciences.”¹ In passages already quoted, Bishop Taylor uses the term “necessary,” urging among his reasons for Confession, “That it is by all Churches esteemed a duty necessary to be done in case of a troubled conscience.” Again George Herbert’s Country Parson, in dealing with his parishioners, follows “the Church’s counsel in persuading them to particular confession, labouring to make them understand . . . how necessary it is in some cases.”² Comber uses similar language : “Although the sins be so secret, or the discipline so remiss, that no public sentence passes on the offender, yet every grievous sinner hath deserved to be censured, and is condemned by his own conscience, and under the displeasure of Almighty GOD, and therefore shall stand in need also of absolution.”³

Some of the authorities here given will appear the stronger, if it be considered that the writers lived before the last revision of the “Office for the Visitation of the Sick,” when as already shown in the history of the revision of the Prayer Book, the directions to the Priest for urging Confession were made more stringent and emphatic. If such was the language used before the Church had given her fullest instructions, how much more strongly does it apply now !

Our recognised rule, then, following the uniform tradition of the Church, affirms the individual ministry of reconciliation to be the proper and ordinary means of remission of grievous and deadly sins, and therefore morally obligatory

¹ A Gag to a New Gospel, p. 82, quoted by Mr. Cooke, in his appendix to his pamphlet on the Power of Church Absolution.

² See Ch. xiii.

³ On the Offices.

in such cases, yet without denying the possibility of forgiveness without it. On this ground the Priest is ordered to "move" the sick person to Confession, should his case be of this nature. The reason manifestly is, lest the sick Penitent omit to use the means specially ordained as a remedy for his great need. The same reason accounts for the Church in her Communion Service leading all her members to express the desire for the restoration of Penance every year at the beginning of Lent, that every one at that season, which earliest tradition has set apart for the renewal and perfecting of repentance, should have recalled to him his own possible need of such a remedy, and the belief of its saving efficacy.

While however this rule has been thus fixed, determining the cases in which Confession is to be regarded as morally obligatory, we must bear in mind how difficult it often is to draw any clear and certain line between classes or degrees of sin; how abstruse the distinctions between venial and mortal sins; how great the tendency of venial to lead to mortal; the possibility of the mere accumulation of venial sins constituting a state equivalent to mortal sin, and the manifold dangers of self-deception in such a state. Moreover a conscientious mind, stirred by the sense of sin, is continually liable to doubt as to its character and extent. Such a mind would also feel that the risk of self-deception is too great, and the consequences of neglect too serious, to restrict the Church's saving discipline within too narrow a line. For such reasons it was that Hooker spoke so strongly of the inducements operating on the soul to seek this means of reconciliation with God, even when not conscious of any positively deadly sin. "Because the knowledge how to handle our own sores is no vulgar and common art, but we either carry towards ourselves for the most part an over-soft and gentle hand, fearful of touching too near

the quick ; or else endeavouring not to be partial, we fall into timorous scrupulosities, and sometimes into those extreme discomforts of mind from which we hardly do ever lift up our heads again ; men thought it the safest way to disclose their secret faults, and to crave imposition of penance, from them whom our LORD JESUS CHRIST hath left in His Church to be spiritual and ghostly physicians, the guides and pastors of redeemed souls, whose office doth not only consist in general persuasions unto amendment of life, but also in the private particular cure of diseased minds."¹

Such being the case, it may be questioned, whether the Roman rule of compulsory Confession, though unsupported by the teaching or use of the early Church, (of which sufficient proof has already been given) may not be practically the more effectual exercise of the power of the keys, and therefore preferable to the discretionary rule adopted in the Church of England, even though allowed to be more truly in accordance with ancient precedent. Under our freer system undoubtedly many that have been guilty of deadly sins, may yet approach the Blessed Sacrament, or may die, without having been reconciled to GOD through the appointed and ordinary means, a case which, when the Roman rule can be fully applied, would be impossible. To this it may be replied, that the compulsory rule to a great extent counteracts itself, and becomes inoperative, by alienating multitudes from the Church's ministry, and even from the Holy Eucharist itself ; for to withdraw from Confession under the Roman system, is *ipso facto* to be excommunicate. The case therefore is by no means so clear as at first sight it may seem to be. It involves an alternative of difficulty. If, on the one hand, the absence of compulsion leads to the neglect of Confession in cases where according to the clearest Catholic tradition it ought to be made, on the

¹ Eccl. Pol. b. vi. ch. iv. 7.

other hand compulsion provokes resistance, and raises up a barrier hindering the approach to higher, and absolutely necessary graces, where yet the soul may have been truly accepted of God. The risk lies between the consequences of an undue force laid upon the conscience, and the turning of liberty into licence. Either way evil may arise. The Church of England has chosen to run any hazard rather than attempt to bind what God has not bound, refusing to enforce by her own authority, as of divine right, a rule for which there appears to be neither scriptural nor primitive evidence. Moreover, the free action of the soul is of the very essence of contrition. An absolute rule, not necessarily indeed, yet practically, will tend to produce a formal and forced use of what specially requires the full surrender of the renewed will, in order to be a living and acceptable service. Nor again is it a light matter, that the effect of the compulsory rule is to add guilt to guilt, because omission to confess is a breach of ecclesiastical law, and therefore according to the doctrine of the Roman Church, a fresh mortal sin. Hence while true contrition entitles the penitent to Absolution in Heaven, his refusal to confess would on this theory bar such Absolution. He would be bound on earth, and therefore bound in Heaven, even though penitent. Is it not a questionable matter and one of very deep moment, thus to run the risk of aggravating a state of sin?¹

At the time of the Reformation the compulsory system of Confession had been fairly tested by a long experience. It is but fair to attribute considerable weight to the practical judgment of those who had witnessed its operation, and decided against it apparently with general consent. Our later experience of its working in foreign Churches, even

¹ For this remark I am indebted to the Rev. J. C. Chambers. (*Essay on Private Confession. The Church and the World*, 1868.)

when viewed in contrast with the disadvantages of our present laxity of discipline, hardly presents so favourable a view, as to lead any thoughtful mind, however anxious for the freest use of Confession, to the conclusion that it would be well to return to the compulsory law binding every one alike.

Might not however a modified rule, compelling Confession in the case of deadly sin alone, have been adopted? The reply is not difficult. (1.) Although the distinctive characteristics of deadly sin are clear in the Eye of God, yet no human judgment can avail to discern them with accuracy, and therefore cannot lay down any rule grounded on this distinction with any fairness. (2.) Even if the subject matter of sin could be accurately defined, it would be impracticable to apply a rule touching all cases equitably, without a free consent on the part of the sinner. For while there are deadly sins, open and notorious, "going before to judgment," which the Church may readily mark and censure, there are also whole classes of sins, equally deadly, which are perfectly secret, to be known only by the free acknowledgment of the transgressor. To deal fairly in the two cases by an absolute rule would be impracticable, and without equity no discipline could be maintained. Not only then is the subject-matter on which the Church has to act, such as precludes the possibility of any general rules, but there are also no means of determining the persons whom she ought to coerce. In a choice manifestly beset with difficulties the Church of England has preferred the risk of a relaxed rule, content to apply her ministry to such as are themselves willing, rather than drive the heart into resistance, by the attempted assertion of an authority which can only be supported by questionable warrants, and which cannot in all cases at least be effectually enforced at all.

It may be doubted, whether the doctrine here advanced,

as that of the Church of England, viz., of special Confession and Absolution, though not enjoined of necessity, yet being the ordinary means of remission of deadly sin after baptism, be in accordance with the language of the Exhortation, so often referred to, in giving notice of Holy Communion. We are there taught the ways and means of becoming a worthy communicant, which are "first, to examine your lives and conversations by the rule of God's commandments, and whereinsoever ye perceive yourselves to have offended, either by will, word, or deed, there to bewail your own sinfulness, and to confess yourselves to Almighty God, with full purpose of amendment of life." After this, apparently as a secondary means, it is added; "if there be any of you who by this means cannot quiet his own conscience herein, but requireth further comfort or counsel," then "let him come to me, or to some other, &c., and open his grief, &c."

The form of expression implies, so it is urged, that confession to God alone is the better way of obtaining pardon and peace; confession to a Priest the less desirable course, to be followed only if the former fails. The case is said to be all the stronger, because deadly sin is evidently referred to; for the cases specified are, "if any be a blasphemer of God, an hinderer or slanderer of His Word, an adulterer, or be in malice or envy, or in any other grievous crime,"—thus including sins which, according to the ancient rule, would certainly have needed to be "reconciled by penance."

In disproof of this interpretation of the passage, it is to be observed, that if the Exhortation were intended to discourage the use of special sacramental confession, in such grievous cases, advising it only as an after-course, and one less desirable, such a view would be irreconcilable with our Reformers' avowed purpose of a faithful adherence to pri-

mitive rule, as well as their positive affirmations in other parts of our formularies, already quoted, as to the virtue and moral obligation, in the supposed cases, of the individual ministry of reconciliation. It can hardly be supposed that the Church should assert this ministry to be Divinely ordained for the remission of deadly sin, and yet actually discourage its use, or speak of it as a subordinate, or even a less desirable, course, in the very cases in which an unquestionable Catholic tradition determines its great benefit. If Ecclesiastical Discipline should ever be enforced in our Communion, it would without doubt include such cases. But the Exhortation, according to the supposed interpretation, would interfere with such restoration of Discipline, which yet the Church leads us year by year to plead before God, as a thing "much to be wished." Such Discipline, if restored, grounded as it must needs be on the ancient rule, would require sacramental Confession, as part of the "Penance," to be followed by Absolution, with the special promise, according to the teaching of the Homily, of "the forgiveness of sin." This revival of the ancient Discipline, however, would altogether clash with the terms of the Exhortation, if, as supposed, it affirms the confession of sin before God alone to be the preferable course.

It is also urged as an objection, that the terms, "*If there be any of you* who by this means cannot quiet his own conscience herein, but requireth, &c.," imply at least a highly exceptional case. Yet it can hardly be denied, that the words are addressed to all; and are intended to lead every one to consider whether it may not be his own case. It must also be remembered that this testing the conscience of every one purposing to communicate, is urged every time the Blessed Sacrament is to be administered. If therefore the words cannot be strained into a normal rule, which is

fully admitted, yet they manifestly involve a general obligation, applicable to great numbers at least at one time or another.¹

The solution of the apparent inconsistency may perhaps be sought in the mixed character of the subject. It has been shown how in the early Church, there were concurrently held two principles in regard to the remission of sins, the covenanted promises attached to the sacramental ministry of Penance, and the inherent acceptableness of true contrition with confession to GOD only. According to the view of the Fathers the latter principle was not supposed to interfere with the laws of canonical discipline, or the special benefits derived through the power of the keys. So likewise according to our rule, the virtue of sacramental Confession is affirmed, while at the same time we assert the freedom of the soul's own secret communion with GOD alone. In our case, as in that of the Church of old, these two principles are equally set forth as not inconsistent with each other. There are special reasons why the latter principle, the acceptableness of contrition and confession to GOD alone, should, in the particular instance under our view, have been put forward. The Exhortation is addressed to persons who from the circumstances of the case are not excommunicate, nor at the time apparently disposed to place themselves under the private directions of the Priest, but purposing, it may be, to come to Communion on the following Sunday or Holy Day. The Exhortation is evidently directed against a low standard of preparation for Holy Communion. Its object is to quicken and stir up a more earnest sense of sin. It seeks by solemn warning to guard those who are not in the habit of Confession against the risk of coming with unrepented and unfor-

¹ The objection alluded to is urged by the writer in the "Quarterly."

given sins upon their souls. The sins specified, though of a deadly character, are such as may be unknown to the Priest, and with which therefore he could not deal by private remonstrance. He is bid to urge on such persons the necessity of repentance before God, as the absolutely essential preliminary to an approach to the Blessed Sacrament, and this accompanied with an intimation of the "benefit of absolution," if the conscience should be stirred by the appeal. The solemn warning is as "a bound set around the Mount," to guard the sacredness of the Sanctuary against those who from any cause may be careless, or, though needing it, unwilling to avail themselves of the ordinary means of reconciliation.

It is a case in which such words as those of S. Chrysostom apply. Speaking of the approach to the LORD's Table, and applying S. Paul's words, he says, "Let each prove himself, and then let him come, and he (S. Paul) biddeth us not to prove ourselves, the one to the other, but each himself, making the judgment-seat private, the proof unwitnessed."¹ And again; "But thou art ashamed and blushest to utter thy sins; nay, but even were it necessary to utter these things before men, and display them, not even thus shouldest thou be ashamed, (for sin, not, to confess sin, is shame,) but now it is not even necessary to confess before witnesses. Be the examination of transgressions in the thoughts of conscience. Be the judgment-seat unwitnessed. Let God alone see thee confessing; GOD Who upbraideth not sins, but remitteth sins on confession. But thou hesitatest even thus, and drawest back?"² And yet at the time these words were uttered, the belief of the Church unquestionably was

¹ Hom. 28, on 1 Cor. § 1, quoted in Dr. Pusey's note M. to Tertullian, Eng. Tr. p. 400; Oxf. 1842.

² Hom. non esse ad gratiam concion. § 3, t. 2, p. 663; in Pusey's note to Tertull. p. 399.

clear and strong as to the sacramental virtue of the ministry of Penance. The exhortations therefore to confess to GOD alone could not have been held to be inconsistent with that ministry. The circumstances of the time, the unwillingness of the people to come forward, as in earlier days of greater fervour to undergo the humiliation of the public penance, rendered it expedient in the judgment of S. Chrysostom to urge the people to secret acts of penitence before GOD, as the most probable alternative. The prevailing belief of the efficacy of contrition without Penance, where the mind was indisposed to yield itself to such a course, would warrant the hope held out to any act of repentance, were it but sincere. And if this mode of dealing was approved in those earlier days, when Discipline still retained much of its primitive force and reverence, a similar course could not be deemed unwarrantable in our own case, with far less means of carrying out the severer rule. The unwillingness in the case of the Church of the East, in S. Chrysostom's time, to enforce the Church's law of Penance, may well be pleaded as a sufficient justification of our Reformers, at the far more difficult crisis which they had to meet, for a like accommodation to the circumstances of their time.

Hooker, alluding to this passage of the Exhortation, implies, that there was no intention of denying the profitability of Confession, but only its supposed necessity, or its enforcement against strong prevailing prejudices. "Neither," he says, "any such opinion had of the thing itself (viz. special confession,) as though it were either unlawful or unprofitable, saving only for these inconveniences which the world hath by experience observed in it heretofore; and in regard thereof the Church of England hitherto hath thought it the safer way to refer men's hidden crimes unto GOD, and themselves only; *howbeit not without special caution* for the admonition of such as come to the holy Sacra-

ment, and for the comfort of such as are ready to depart the world."¹

Further, be it observed, that in allowing this freedom as to Confession, care was taken that no one should ever approach the Blessed Sacrament without receiving priestly Absolution, though not of an individual, yet of a very solemn public kind.

The general confession and absolution in our Communion Office were framed for the express purpose of insuring some measure at least of the grace of this ministry to all who frequent the services of the Church, thus meeting, so far as is possible, the needs of those who, from whatever cause, make use of the liberty to confess themselves to God alone. The old Latin forms of confession occurring in the daily Offices, and in the Mass, translated and embodied in our own formularies, were, as already observed, enlarged and deepened in tone. The forms of Absolution also were made fuller and more emphatic. The rubric directing the Priest, and the Priest only, to "turn himself to the people," and the term, "pronounce," expressive, as it is, of authority, manifestly were intended to invest the act with increased solemnity. The form of Absolution in the Communion Office, recalling the special promise given to the Church's ministry in the exercise of its absolving power, marked it as an official act: "Almighty God, . . . Who of His great mercy hath promised forgiveness of sins to all them that with hearty repentance and true faith turn unto Him," &c. And the same official character attaches to the Absolution in our Daily Offices, which speaks of "the power and commandment given" by Almighty God to "His ministers, to declare and pronounce to His peo-

¹ Eccles. Pol. b. vi. 4, 15.

ple, being penitent, the absolution and remission of their sins,"¹

At the same time it must be acknowledged, that notwithstanding the explanations above given as to the causes of the changes alluded to, the absence of any fixed rule and therefore of any definite obligation to confess in any case, has been the cause of leaving multitudes of our brethren to die without the absolving grace personally and individually applied, whom the Discipline of primitive times would surely have constrained to seek this special covenanted means of reconciliation. And the consideration of this loss leads to the question of the possible efficacy of public absolution supplying the absence of the private and individual ministry.

¹ The Latin forms of Confession at Mass, (the same are used at Private Confession) are given in a note in ch. xiv. The form of Absolution in our Communion Office very closely resembles the "Misereatur" of the Sarum missal, which is as follows :

"Misereatur vestri Omnipotens Deus, et dimittat vobis omnia peccata vestra ; liberet vos ab omni malo ; conservet et confirmet in bono ; et ad vitam perducatur æternam. Amen."

There are two Confessions and Absolutions in a Communion Mass, according to the Roman rite. The Priest on first going to the altar says the Confiteor reciprocally with the Server. This is merely the preparation of the Priest and Server for the office that follows. The practice seems to be a remnant of the mutual Confession spoken of in S. James v. 16, showing how the Church preserved the more popular view of that passage along with the deeper and fuller one.

At the close of the Mass, if there are communicants, when the Priest is ready to communicate the people, one of the assistants or one of the communicants themselves says the Confiteor, and the Priest says the Absolution, making the sign of the cross towards the communicants. In this case the Confiteor and Absolution are only said once, as in our office.

I am indebted to Mr. Mackonochie for the part of this note which relates to the Roman rite, and for the suggestion which led to a change of the passage in the text to which it relates.

To assist in determining whether or no, the defect may be thus in any degree supplied, I am glad to avail myself of the remarks of a learned and devout writer in the "*Ecclesiastic*."¹ After strongly expressing his belief that "private absolution is the proper exercise of the sacerdotal commission, and the one proper mode of conveying the benefit of it," and that the "blessings obtained by personal confession and individual absolution are so distinct and great, that no elevation of the general forms can bring them into competition with them,"—he suggests that "the absolution of the general services, if they be received in contrition, with faith and hope," may be the means of conveying "renewed cleansing, release from the bonds of sin, and relief from its effects;" and that repeated confessions and absolutions "may tend even to the putting away of deadly as well as venial sin." "The subject," he proceeds to say, "is indeed a deep and difficult one, both as regards the miserable effects of sin, and the means for the removal of them. Far should we be from underrating the great and supremely high effects of proper absolution on confession. This stands out in marked contrast to any other appointed means when received, as is of course implied, in the sincerity of penitence and faith. The benefit thus conveyed is definite, known and secured : for this is a pledge, as well as a means, of forgiveness, not to mention the comfort and assurance given to the penitent by the judgment of another rather than his own. Without this we must believe, that remission and release is gradual, and the assurance of it less certain and less definite, however hopeful and comforting." "But," he adds, "shall we fathom and limit either the manifold effects of sin, or the manifold means by which these effects may be removed? The Church prays for the remission of sins

¹ No. XXXIX., March, 1849. *The Doctrine of Absolution*, pp. 169, 170.

after absolution has been pronounced ; she so prayed of old, she so prays in other branches of the Church besides our own. Surely there is some meaning in this. There is some meaning in the continual repetition of a prayer for forgiveness, in the words our LORD has taught us, in our daily service ; still more in the recurring devotions of Lent, and in the Penitential-Psalms. These prayers are not to be limited to sins of daily incursion, they run back over our whole lives, entreating for the forgiveness of the most deadly, even more than of venial sins ; and they have their efficacy. Why then should not the absolutions, which are said to us in general, have some corresponding efficacy ? The previous confession and prayer for pardon, the very acts of faith and contrition involved therein, have, as is admitted, an efficacy that way. Why should not the priest's absolution have the like effect ? If it be said, it is a general absolution said for all alike, so, we may reply, is his benediction. Yet this has its effect, as we conceive the absolution has, when it comes upon a soul, duly prepared for the reception of it. If it be said, that the form is only a general declaration of God's forgiving the penitent, let it be remembered that the declaration is prefaced by an announcement of the sacerdotal commission : and then let the principle to which we have referred of the Church's intention, be taken into account. That the intention of the absolution in the daily service was to cleanse the worshippers, we think, cannot reasonably be questioned. That the intention of the form before the Communion was so, likewise appears clear. Let us look then to the intent, not to the mere words, and then we see a provision not only for a cleansing from venial, but for some renewed cleansing, or some assisting influence towards the entire removal of the effects of the gravest sins to the truly penitent." The writer closes his observations with a quotation from "the

Catholic-minded Sherlock, the teacher of Bishop Wilson," as confirmatory of his opinion: "After the confession (in the daily service) when the minister comes to the words of absolution, bow down your head, and say softly, in your heart, 'LORD, let this pardon pronounced by Thy minister, fall upon my soul, and seal thereunto the forgiveness of all my sins.'"

It is important to add to the foregoing remarks, what Morinus notes as to the exceptional use of general absolutions in the remission even of deadly sins without any special confession. He states that "formerly in many churches, chiefly Metropolitan and Cathedral churches, it was customary every year on Maundy Thursday to offer, in the name of the whole congregation, a general confession embracing all kinds of sins, after which a general absolution, equally embracing all sins, was solemnly given." He adds, that in many churches this custom still prevailed in his time, as e.g., in the Metropolitan church, and the several parishes, of the diocese of Paris. The form in which the Absolution was given, is grounded on the promise of our LORD; 'Whatsoever ye shall bind,' &c., thus implying the full exercise of the priestly ministry, and it also comprehended all sins, whether "in thought, word, or deed, or omission from negligence."¹ Morinus remarks that this ab-

¹ This office is called in France "l'Absoute." The mode of administration is thus described by Morinus: "After a confession embracing sins of every kind offered by the Priest in the name of the people, . . . he directs, that those who have it by heart say the *Confiteor*, and that those who do not know it say instead a 'Pater-noster' and an 'Ave Maria.' Then follows the General Absolution:—

"Through the merits of the Passion and Resurrection of JESUS CHRIST our LORD, through the intercession of Blessed Mary ever Virgin, and of All Saints, the Almighty GOD have mercy on you, and forgive you all your sins, and bring you to everlasting life. Amen. Pardon and absolution of all your sins, a contrite and truly penitent

solution was evidently not a release from excommunication, nor connected in any way with Indulgences, but a real remission of sins (*vera realisque remissio peccatorum*.)¹ He supposes the intention of this act of reconciliation originally to have been the supplying any defect in previous absolutions given after special confession, in consequence of questions arising from the reservation of cases, on the part of the Pope towards the people generally, or of an abbot towards the members of his community; that therefore this general absolution is not to be viewed separately in itself, but as operative in connection with the special absolutions previously received. At the same time he implies, that it is a relic of a former state of things, when absolution was given with less of limitation than the later use of the Middle Ages warranted. He closes his remarks by saying, "The ancients do not seem to have restricted absolution of sins within such narrow bounds . . . as the scholastic doctors afterwards did."²

If notwithstanding the explanations here given, it should still appear to any one a hurtful laxity to admit any person

heart, the grace and consolation of the HOLY SPIRIT, the Almighty GOD grant to you. Amen.'

"Then stretching out his right hand towards the people, let him say: 'Let us pray. Our LORD JESUS CHRIST, Who said to His disciples, 'Whatsoever ye shall bind,' &c., in the number of whom He hath willed me unworthy sinner to be a minister, through the intercession of, &c. : may He absolve you through our ministry from all your sins, whatever in thought, word, or deed, omission from negligence, you have done, and may He vouchsafe to bring you, released from all their bonds, to the kingdom of heaven, Who with the FATHER, &c. Amen. The blessing of our LORD JESUS CHRIST descend upon you, and abide with you for ever, in the Name of, &c. Amen.'" Lib. iv. c. xxvi. § iii.

This form is quoted from the Paris Manual of 1615.

¹ Ibid. § ix.

² Lib. viii. c. xxvi. § xiii. He adds the singular, but very significant

to the Blessed Sacrament without the security of special Confession, from the great risk of the approach of unworthy communicants; and that the freedom allowed amongst us in doubtful cases has no parallel in the better ages of the Church's history, the following words of S. Augustine ought to be carefully weighed. They imply that in his day it was thought better to run such a risk, casting the responsibility of the decision on the individual conscience, rather than assert in all cases a precarious power which might possibly diminish the sense of responsibility, and without any certain safeguard against self-deception, or evasion. "Let no one suppose that he ought therefore to despise the counsel of this salutary Penance, because perchance he notices and knows, that many approach to the Sacrament of the Altar, whose such and such crimes he is not ignorant of. For many are corrected, as Peter; many are tolerated, as Judas; many are not known, until the LORD come, Who will illuminate the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the thoughts of the heart. For most persons are on that account unwilling to accuse others, while they wish by their means to excuse themselves. But most good Christians are for this reason silent, and suffer the sins of others which they know, because they often lack evidence, and are unable to prove to ecclesiastical judges, that which they themselves know. For although some things be true, yet they are not to be easily believed by the judge, unless they be shown by certain proofs. But we cannot hinder any one from communion (although this prohibition be not yet mortal, but medicinal,) unless either one that hath of his own accord confessed, or that has been ac-

and pregnant remark: "Nondum edocti erant (antiqui) artem illam de singulis rebus theologicis præcisè, definitè et quasi punctim, et circumcurrente lineâ, disserendi. Liberius vagatur eorum sermo, attamen ἡ γλῶσσ' ἀμαρτάνουσα τ' ἀληθῆ λέγει."

cused and convicted in some either secular or ecclesiastical court."¹

It is important to remark, that our rubrical directions to the Priest for dealing with his people in reference to Holy Communion, advance, in strictness of rule, beyond what is implied in this last sentence of S. Augustine, and would, if faithfully carried out, raise our discipline above what seems to have been practicable in his day.²

NOTE.

A downward change made in a well-known book, of considerable authority, published of late years, for the use of the Clergy, seems to deserve a passing notice. At the end of "The Clergyman's Instructor, or a Collection of Tracts on the Ministerial Duties," printed in Oxford at the Clarendon Press, when first published, was placed Bishop Stearne's "Tractatus de Visitatione Infirmorum," &c. At the close of the treatise the Bishop gives references to books recommended for the use of the Parish Priest, and in the list of names appear the following Latin writers on points touching the care of the sick and dying, and on Confession.

Tractatus Johannis Polanci, qui inscribitur, Methodus ad eos adjuvandos qui moriuntur.

Practica visitandi infirmos, per Jacobum Mancinum, cum Additionibus Laurentii Cutilli.

Bernardinus de Officio Curati, cum Annotationibus And. Victorelli, in cap. de Moribundis.

Jo. Gerson, Cancellarius olim Parisiensis, de arte audiendi confessiones.

Methodus Confessionis, per Petrum de Soto.

Directorium breve ad Confessarii et Confitentis munus recte obeundum, auctore Jo. Polanco.

Reginaldi Praxis Fori Pœnitentialis.

Bishop Stearne's Treatise with his list of authors is found in the two first editions of "The Clergyman's Instructor," published in 1807 and 1813.

¹ Serm. cccli. De Pœnitentia, i. c. iv. sec. 10.

² See rubrics prefacing our Office for Holy Communion.

These references disappear in later editions. Whether they remain in the third edition, I am not aware. But in my copy, which is the fourth edition, published in 1827, Bishop Wilson's *Parochialia* is substituted for Stearne's *Treatise*.

The withdrawal of the list of Authors quoted as exemplifying Bishop Stearne's views and recommended by him, a recommendation sanctioned by the Delegates of the Clarendon Press, was the removal of a very important witness to the similarity of principles recognised as existing between our own use of Confession and that of the Latin Church in general. The list also shows the care which was taken, even in those days, to set before the Parish Priest the means of fitting himself for this part of his ministry. Bishop Stearne's *Treatise* is also a loss, for it contains a valuable practical exposition, in a very earnest tone, of the different modes of leading Penitents on to Confession in cases of need. But, for the sanction given to the principle of Confession, Wilson's testimony is no less strong than Bishop Stearne's.

His "instructions" "Concerning Confession and Absolution" open with the following sentences :—

"Concerning Confession, Archbishop Usher has these words : ' No kind of confession, either public or private, is disallowed by our Church, that is any way requisite for the due execution of the ancient power of the keys, which CHRIST bestowed on the Church.'

"Concerning Absolution, Bishop Andrewes hath these words : ' It is not said by CHRIST, *Whose sins ye wish and pray for, or declare to be remitted* ; but, *Whose sins ye remit* ; to which He addeth a promise, that He will make it good, and that His power shall accompany the power He has given them, and the lawful execution of it in His Church for ever.'

"And indeed the very same persons baptise for the remission of sins, and administer the LORD'S Supper as a seal of the forgiveness of sins to all worthy communicants.

"It is not water that can wash away sin, nor bread and wine ; but these rightly administered, by persons truly authorised, to persons duly qualified by faith and repentance. And thus absolution benefiteth, by virtue of the power which JESUS CHRIST has given His ministers."—Bishop Wilson's *Parochialia*, or *Instructions to the Clergy*.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE SEAL OF CONFESSION.

THE seal of Confession has been spoken of incidentally in the course of our argument, and its principle adduced as an unmistakeable and striking proof of the reality and acknowledged sacredness of Confession. For no mere breach of confidence between man and man, even in the most secret things of the soul, has ever been supposed to involve the sin of sacrilege, such as unquestionably, according to the universal law of the Church, is incurred by the Priest who reveals what he has heard in Confession.

It must be borne in mind that the seal of Confession is the safeguard, not of the Priest, but of the Penitent. Although the Penitent is morally bound to secrecy, except for some real and grave cause, by the sacredness of the relation existing between him and the Priest ; and to speak without such excuse, either of his own or the Priest's part in the act of Confession, is an irreverence, yet moral considerations only, dependent upon the mutual trust implied in the act, affect him. On the other hand the seal is laid upon the lips of the Priest with all the solemnity of a sacramental bond, as an irrefragable security for the Penitent, whether or no he preserve a similar secrecy with regard to the Priest's dealing towards himself.

The laws guarding the seal of Confession, and determining its extent and application, as in the case of all other

details of the sacrament of Penitence, only gradually assumed a settled form and consistence. Its principle, indeed, was observed even when Confession was made in public; and the idea of secrecy would therefore hardly seem to apply. Tertullian, remonstrating with those who were held back from public Penance, because they dreaded exposure, urges that to reveal their sin to the congregation, composed of men of like passions and like faith, and therefore full of sympathizing love and pity, was, in truth, no such exposure as they need fear. "Why shunnest thou those who share thy fall, as though they rejoiced over it? The body cannot rejoice in the hurt of one of its members; all must grieve together and labour together for its cure."¹ This implies secrecy towards those without.

Sozomen shows how this vital objection was sought to be secured by the appointment of Penitentiaries, the Church's rapid increase in numbers having rendered public confession more and more repulsive to the Penitent, and inexpedient for the Church. "It is hateful, as probably it appeared to the Clergy from earliest ages, to publish men's sins in the hearing of the multitude of the Church, as in a theatre. Therefore they appointed to this office some Priest out of those of best regulated life, close of speech and discreet."²

Morinus³ notes from Sozomen that the same custom was adopted by the Sects, the Novatians who altogether rejected the Church's law of Confession, alone being excepted. A passage of S. Augustine has already been adduced to the same effect in proof of the encouragement given by those in authority to the substitution of private for public Confession.⁴ The following extract shows how completely the great Doctor of the West recognised the absolute law of

¹ De Pœnit. c. x. Oxf. Tr. p. 366.

² Sozom. l. vii. c. 16.

³ De Pœnit. l. ii. c. xix. § iii.

⁴ See Chap. iii.

secrecy to which, whether in the public or private use of Penance, the Penitent might wholly trust. Commenting on Lev. v. 1, which speaks of the guilt of one who "hears the voice of swearing, and is a witness whether he hath seen and known of it; if he do not utter it," and decrees that "then he shall bear his iniquity;" and showing how the command involves the difficulty of one thus guilty, though penitent, becoming liable to public condemnation, possibly even to death,—he advises that the sin should be divulged "to a Priest, because he can pray for him, but cannot prosecute him."¹ The Scripture precept might thus be kept, and yet mercy be shown to the sinner.

As the Church's code of law grew, canons were passed securing under stringent penalties the Priest's observance of the seal, so far as it could be applied during the prevalence of the public system. S. Basil, e.g., in reference to the case of confession of adultery by women, says, "Our fathers have forbidden their exposure." The Priest was charged, when imposing a penance, to avoid such as might betray the nature of her sin.²

A far more important evidence is involved in a Canon made at the last Session of the Council of Carthage,³ held in the years 418, 419. The Canon rules that "no one

¹ Morinus, l. ii., c. xix., § xi.

² Ad Amphil. Can. xxxiv.; Bev. Pand. tom. ii. p. 93.

³ Gratian, P. II., causa vi., q. ii., c. iii., *Placuit ut si*. It is thus epitomized by Ferrandus Diaconus:—"Ut Episcopus a Communionem non suspendat eum quem asserit de peccato aliquo sibi fecisse confessum." Morinus, l. ii., c. xv., where it is given at length. It is of authority both in the East and West. See The Pandects, tom. i., pp. 667, 8; Cann. Conc. Carth. cxxxiii., cxxxiv., with the comments of Balsamon, Zonaras and Aristenus. Morinus also finds it in Burchard, l. xix., c. 127; and Ivo, P. v. c. 363, and Ep. 97. A somewhat similar decree was made by the Council of Vaison, A.D. 442; Gratian, u. s. c. ii., *Si tantum Episcopus*.

should charge another with guilt which he could not establish by other evidence than his own confession" (ne dicat in quenquam quod aliis documentis convincere non potest.) The punishment of the offender, even though a bishop, was excommunication. Morinus remarks on this Canon; "If a Priest exposing a Penitent thus generally, was dealt with so severely, what would have been the punishment, if the special sin confessed were divulged!"

All doubts or questioning as to the extent of the obligation of the seal, were finally set at rest by the Canon passed in the Council of Lateran, under Innocent III. It was then laid down that "neither by word, or sign, or any other mode whatever, even in the least degree" should a Priest betray the sinner; and that if he need counsel for himself in dealing with his Penitent, he must seek it cautiously without betraying the person referred to."¹

The penalty incurred by the breach of this rule was not only deprivation, but also lifelong penance within the walls of a monastery.

The principle according to which this obligation to secrecy on the part of the Priest assumed so solemn a character, is that he hears a confession not as man, but as in the place of God. What he thus hears he knows only sacramentally, as within the veil of another world. As sins truly repented of and confessed, are covered and put away from the sight of God, even so they are as though they were not, to the Priest who knows them only in Confession. So complete is the bond of secrecy, that the obligation holds good equally after the death of the Penitent. The departed is as secure against the exposure of his sin as the living. Moreover the

¹ "Caveat autem omnino ne verbo, aut signo, aut alio quovis modo aliquatenus prodatur peccatorem. Sed si prudentiori consilio indigerit, illud absque ulla expressione personæ caute requirat." Can. xxi. Decr. Greg. tit. xxxviii. c. xii.

rule applies to light, or so called venial, sins equally as to the most grave and deadly ; and to the circumstances of the sins confessed, as to the sins themselves.

The obligation of the seal also tells indirectly as well as directly. Thus accomplices, or persons concerned in the sin confessed, are as secure as the Penitent. Other incidental points, such as the penance or advice given ; the dispositions, defects, or weaknesses of the Penitent, whether moral or physical ; his fears and scruples, doubts or temptations, whether or no Absolution followed the confession, &c., are under the same protection, and on the same principle, viz. that whatever morally or spiritually affects the reputation or peace of the Penitent, as far as his confession extends, forms part of the same privileged communication. So careful is the Priest required to be, lest, even by implication only, he should expose the Penitent to remark, that he ought not to impose a penance calculated to excite suspicions as to the nature of the sin for which it is given, at least not without the consent of the Penitent. Nor ought the Priest without his permission to speak to the Penitent out of confession of what he knows only through confession, because he is bound not to open what is covered, even to the person himself. The matter confessed is in fact to be as though unknown, even between the Priest and the Penitent, except within the sphere of the sacrament of confession itself. If there be need to refer at all to what has passed in confession, it should be done in a subsequent confession, and then only in case the truth of the subsequent confession depend upon it, or the one bear by necessary consequence on the other.

These and similar conclusions follow alike from the primary principle, that what is confessed is as though it were not. It is sealed and put away as absolving grace reaches it, for all purposes and effects of mere human know-

ledge. Such absolute hiddenness is part of the same mystery of grace, which preserves the act of confession from consequences that might follow the mere ordinary relation of secret sin, the consciousness of the Priest being preternaturally, to a real and great extent, shielded from dangerous effects which the exposure of sin might otherwise have upon him, either in himself, or in his feelings towards the Penitent, the sacramental character of the act separating it by a real line of demarcation from accidents of mere natural human intercourse.

It is not meant in what is here said that a Priest may not speak under any circumstances of what becomes known to him in confession, as the Canon quoted above shows. He may, e.g., need to seek advice as to dealing with a Penitent ; or he may have cause to desire to compare his own experience with that of others. He may for such objects take counsel with another Priest. Only in this case the point to be secured is, that no injury be done to the Penitent by such communication, nor the slightest possibility allowed to arise of the person by whom the sin referred to has been confessed, becoming known. So strict is the obligation, that even if the sin be otherwise publicly known, the Priest who knows it only in confession is on his own part equally bound to secrecy.

It is evident that very special care needs to be taken by a Confessor in dealing out of Confession with dependents. A well known rule, e.g., determines, that Superiors of Religious Communities ought not to employ knowledge gained through Confession for purposes of government. The same principle applies to a Priest's dealing with a parishioner or a servant, or one with whom he may be on terms of familiarity. His mode of dealing or manner of intercourse are not to be affected by impressions received or knowledge gained in Confession, at least not to the prejudice of the

Penitent. The spheres of consciousness in which the Priest holds relation with others, in or out of Confession, ought practically to be wholly different. The seal is laid not only on his lips, but in his heart. The rule of secrecy, and were it possible of unconsciousness, applies most strictly where there is any special risk of results unfavourable to the Penitent. It is absolutely necessary that, at all events and by whatever means, one should be secured against suffering injury from the confession of his sins. Where the result would be favourable, and he would be a gainer rather than a loser, the safeguard as to the possible influence upon ordinary intercourse does not equally apply.¹

An important question remains as to cases in which the intention to commit a crime involving injury to others, is confessed, and the knowledge thus obtained, if acted upon, might serve to prevent its being carried into effect. The danger may affect the Priest, or those for whom he is specially bound to care, either in person or property. The question is, whether the seal of confession precludes the Priest from taking such measures as may save himself, or those involved in the supposed danger.

The answer is easy, if the object clearly be to prevent sin being committed; for the principle of the seal is to guard the penitent from injury, and to restrain him from sin is not to inflict an injury. To take measures to prevent the commission of a sin, would be to confer a benefit both on him-

¹ See Billuart, *Summa Sancti Thomæ*. Tom. ix. Dissert. viii. Art. i.—v. De Sigillo Confessionis; where the subject is fully discussed under the following different heads. (a) *Utrum in nullo casu liceat sacerdoti revelare peccata quæ audivit in confessione?* (b) *Ad quæ se extendat sigillum confessionis?* (c) *Utrum de licentia confitentis possit sacerdos ejus peccatum alteri prodere?* (d) *Utrum liceat uti notitia ex sola confessione sacramentali hausta?*

self and others. The difficulty is as to cases where only a suspicion as to the possibility of intended injury, dwells on the mind of the Priest, as the result of a confession. The prevailing opinion on this point, even among the strictest Canonists, is that it is lawful to use such knowledge if the object be manifestly to prevent injury or wrong, and provided always that nothing be done to expose the Penitent to those who are ignorant of his sin.

Schoolmen are divided as to what the Priest's duty would be, in case his own life be hazarded by concealment, and the question lay between his safety, and the exposure of the Penitent.¹ It is especially necessary to consider this question because of the exception to the rule of secrecy, mentioned in the concluding part of our Canon (the 113th) of the year 1604. After marking, as strongly as any former Canon of the Church had ever ruled, the sin of a Priest who divulges a confession, by affixing to it the penalty of irregularity, which as already observed² implies deprivation from office and consequently permanent disability to act ever again as a Priest, the Canon adds; "Except the crime be such as by the laws of the realm his own life may be called in question for concealing the same."

Such a clause is, as far as the author is aware, unprecedented in the Laws of the Church; and the origin of its insertion in our own Canonical Code is matter of considerable interest. That it was dictated by the strong instinct at the time influencing the rulers of the Church of England, to

¹ See Billuart, Dissert. viii. Art. v. ad fin. The argument turns on the critical question how far the natural law of self-preservation cancels the canonical obligation which rests on the claim to exemption on the part of the Penitent. The case is put of a heathen or heretical master, threatening a Confessor with death, unless he declare what his servant had confessed to him, when possibly the disclosure might imperil the life of the servant.

² See Ch. xii.

pay an overweening deference to the claims of the State, can hardly be questioned. Coke was at the time Attorney General, and it is highly probable that his influence was exerted in framing the Canons of 1604. His tendency to subject ecclesiastical to civil law, is notorious. Bancroft, among the Bishops, is generally supposed to have had the chief hand in the formation of the Canons, and he is well known to have been much involved in the Court politics of the time.

Laud, who was charged with framing the Canons for Scotland, alludes to this particular clause which was inserted, *totidem verbis*, in the corresponding Scotch Canons on Confession, as marking his care for the State. Considering that at the time he spoke his life, about to be forfeited for faithfulness to the Church, was in the balance, it is deeply touching to note his defence in allusion to this Canon; "Where first give me leave to observe the care that I had for the laws of the kingdom."¹

It is not to be supposed that there is not ample authority in the Catholic Church for such an exception to the Seal of Confession, although it may not have been expressly laid down in any previous Canon. On the contrary, the theologians of the Gallican Church had carried the principle far beyond what is contemplated in the Canon, and among the Italians also there are names of mark quoted in support of the same view.

¹ Laud was at the time on trial for his life, as having unduly exalted the power of the Church to the detriment of the State. After the words quoted in the text, he goes on to say, "For I believe it will hardly be found that such a clause is inserted in any Canon concerning the Seal of Confession, as is expressed in this Canon, in relation to the laws of the realm, from the time that Confession came into solemn use, till our English Canon was made, anno 1603, with which this (the Scotch Canon) agrees." *History of the Troubles and Trial of William Laud, &c., &c.* Laud's Works, vol. iii., p. 331, Lib. of Anglo-Cath. Theology.

Bishop Andrewes¹ argues the case in reference to Garnet the Jesuit, who was accused of complicity with the Gunpowder Plot in consequence of his intercourse, as a Priest, with one of the conspirators. Garnet was believed, as Andrewes shows, to have known of the plot independently of anything he may have heard in Confession. But not confining himself to this ground of charge, Andrewes shows with a considerable amount of evidence that the recognized interpretation of the Seal of Confession did not release him, under the special circumstances of the case, from the necessity of doing what he could to prevent the execution of the Plot. As to the line of argument urged by Andrewes, in disproof of Garnet's claim to exemption, I am glad to avail myself of the words of a friend² who thus states the case :

"The Seal of Confession is manifestly subject to ecclesiastical regulation, for originally at every confession it was left to the Bishop or Priest receiving it to decide whether secrecy should be observed, or the sin published and the sinner put to open penance.

"An apt illustration of the exception in our Canon occurred in England the year after it came into force. When Garnet, the Provincial of the English Jesuits, was charged with the concealment of the conspiracy known as the Gunpowder Plot, he 'endeavoured to excuse himself by alleging it was discovered to him under the Seal of Confession.' To this Overall, then Dean of S. Paul's, replied 'that confession related to things past, and not to intentions of doing something for the future;' and 'urged further that the old schoolmen and their best casuists obliged the Priest to dis-

¹ Tortura Torti, sive ad Matthæi Torti librum Responsio. Andrewes' Works, Library of Anglo-Catholic Theology, pp. 355—361.

² The Rev. W. E. Scudamore of Ditchingham, to whom I have already expressed my obligation in reference to this work.

cover a design, though never so secretly communicated, where the concealment is likely to prove dangerous to the State.¹ Bishop Andrewes in his *Tortura Torti*² gives three instances in which this liberty had been employed with approbation. The first is the case of a nobleman who 'confessed to a Minorite Friar that he had once intended to murder King Francis, but had repented of the design.' The Friar imposed a penance and absolved him; but gave information to the King, and, after an investigation before the Parliament of Paris, the nobleman was put to death. Another case is that of the Sieur de Haulteville, who, believing himself dying, had confessed that he had once formed the same design against the King. The fact was revealed by his Confessor, and with the same result. In the third instance, a similar act of treason was meditated; but it was distinguished by this circumstance, that the conspirator (Pierre Barrière) could not be induced to renounce his design. The Confessor, a Jacobin Friar, named Seraphino Banchi, accordingly informed against him, and he was tried, condemned and executed.

"There can be no doubt or difficulty when the crime has not yet been committed, and the person who confesses the intention or desire has not entirely renounced it, and given evidence of a sincere repentance. It is a common principle with the schoolmen and casuists that 'when one confesses that he *intends* to do some ill thing, it has not been said *in foro pœnitentiali*,' and therefore the Priest 'is not bound to conceal it in consideration of that Sacrament.'³ This principle clearly justified Banchi, and would have justified

¹ Collier's Eccl. Hist., Pt. II., B. viii., p. 690.

² P. 293; Anglo-Cath. Lib., p. 355.

³ Angelus de Clavasio, A.D. 1480, in his *Summa Casuum Conscientiæ*, sub voce "Confess." ult. num. 7, cas. iii. fol. xlvii. as cited by Andrewes. *Tortura Torti*, p. 294; al. 557. He adduces (*ibidem*) to the

Garnet (as he afterwards owned) if he had taken the same course. In the two other examples cited by Andrewes, the Seal of Confession was wrongfully broken; for (so far, at least, as appears) the life of the King was no longer in any danger.

“The rule laid down in our Canon is in strict accordance with the above conclusion of the Schoolmen. If a capital crime be still meditated, the Confessor by remaining silent would put himself in danger from the laws of the realm; and he is therefore free to reveal it. If, on the other hand, the criminal design has been renounced, he is in no danger, and is therefore bound to secrecy.

“When a wicked design has been confessed but not renounced, there has been no Sacramental Confession, and there is no Seal to be broken. It has then become a question of expediency, or duty, whether the Priest reveal the secret of the false Penitent or not. Circumstances may, however, occur in which it will be right for him to reveal the secret of a true Penitent, and that, even when neither the peace of the State nor his own life are likely to be endangered. The following supposed case, cited by Morinus from William of Auxerre,¹ is of this kind. ‘Titius confesses to a Priest that he has sinned with Caia. Titius dies. The brother of Titius wishes to marry Caia. The Bishop orders the same Priest to join them in marriage. If he obeys, he appears to be guilty of mortal sin. ‘In brotherly reproof,’ says he (William,) ‘he is not called a betrayer of the crime who makes it known to one who can do good and not harm. If therefore the said Priest reveal that to the Bishop, who can do good and not harm, he does not sin;

same effect Alexander of Hales, A.D. 1220; Sylvester Prierias, 1510; Panormitanus, 1428; Dominicus Sotus, 1550; Innocent IV., 1243, &c.

¹ In Summa, l. iv. tr. vi., q. 4; Morinus, De Pœnit., l. ii., c. xvi., n. viii.

especially as he who is dead ought, were he alive, to desire that it should be revealed.' ”

It appears then that the case supposed in our Canon as forming an exception to the law of secrecy is, strictly speaking, no real exception in principle. The law of the Seal contemplates sacramental Confession, which is defined to be such as “is made to a Priest having or supposed to have power of absolving, with the design on the part of the Penitent of accusing himself, and subjecting himself to the power of the keys, whether or no absolution follow.”¹ According to this definition, to reveal an intention to commit sin, and thus implicate the Priest in an evil design, without any thought of repentance, is not Confession, and can claim no benefit as a sacramental act. It is an abuse of the ministry, and cannot therefore plead its privileges. A Priest conscious of the sacredness of the act of Confession, though abused, and anxious to avoid scandal which must result from such abuse becoming known, ought not unnecessarily to expose the pretended Penitent; but at the same time the consideration of what is due both to himself and others ought to weigh with him, and he is free to take such measures as he may deem fit either to save himself or others from probable loss or harm.²

¹ “Sacramentalis Confessio est quæ fit illi, qui habet aut habere creditur potestatem absolvendi, cum animo se peccatorem accusandi, et peccata sua clavibus ecclesiæ subjiciendi, etiam si non sequatur absolutio.” Billuart, vol. ix. p. 445; Dissert. viii., Art. 1.

² “Si quis accedat ad confessarium animo ipsum decipiendi, irridendi, protrahendi in peccatum, aliquid ab eo extorquendi, etc., non est confessio sacramentalis, non obligat ad sigillum Si quis accedat ad confessionem sine ullo dolore et proposito emendæ, et sine voluntate absolutionem recipiendi, sed tamen cum animo se subjiciendi sacerdoti tanquam ecclesiæ ministro, sive ut ab illo prout poterit juvetur, sive ut aliquo modo satisfaciat ecclesiæ precepto, sit hæc confessio sacramentalis

It seems needless to anticipate a combination of circumstances so exceptional and extreme as those which the Canon contemplates. More especially in our case where confession is voluntary, the improbability of such an occurrence is so great, that the case hardly needs a fuller consideration, at least in such a general survey of the subject as is here intended, although the principles on which the solution of such cases rests, besides their own interest, may serve to remove doubts in minor cases more or less similar in character. With regard however to the general question at issue, nothing can show more strongly the importance and sacredness of Confession than the extreme anxiety with which the obligations of a Confessor, even in cases of rarest occurrence, have been in every age of the Church considered; and with what jealousy the Church has uniformly guarded the rights of Penitents, and shielded the act of Confession from any possible exposure. Nor can the Divine character of the institution be more surely exhibited than by the fact that even when the safety of states and the security of human life are at stake, the Priest is religiously bound at the risk of all that is most dear to him, conscientiously to weigh what is due to his office, and to the claims real or supposed of those who thus trust themselves to his ministry.

inducens obligationem sigilli? Affirmat Sylvius . . . ejus confessio ea ex parte est aliquo modo sacramentalis. Cæterum in dubio favendum est sigillo." Ibid., p. 446.

CHAPTER XVII.

ABSOLUTION.

THE doctrine of Absolution is so intimately connected with that of Confession, and so essentially complementary to its use, that although often incidentally touched upon in the foregoing argument, it needs a separate and fuller consideration.

The Catholic Church has never defined Absolution, nor the distinctive efficacy of its several modes of administration. No controversy having arisen on these questions while the Church was yet one and undivided, there was no occasion for, and therefore no exercise of, an œcumenical judgment, such as sealed the articles of faith concerning the Nature of GOD, or the Person of our LORD. As Baptism and the Holy Eucharist were left undefined, so likewise and for the same reasons was Absolution. In this, equally as in those greater parallel cases, the Church's doctrine is to be gathered from her traditionary usages, and the writings of the Fathers.

That the power of Absolution was uniformly believed to be vested in the Priesthood, has been already sufficiently proved. Its connection with Baptism and the Eucharist has been also implied. Of the baptismal ministry it is, as it were, but an extension. Remission of sins is one part of the baptismal grace, and therefore the absolving power necessarily enters into its administration. Absolution, as a

subsequent and distinct act, is the restoration of this baptismal grace, when lost ; its renewal, when decayed. Its exercise is essentially involved in Holy Baptism, and its repetition is rendered necessary by the universal liability to sin still besetting the regenerate. It is in like manner connected with the holy Eucharist. For the Body and Blood of our LORD can be rightly received only by the pure of heart—"holy things for the holy." The stains of sin, therefore, such as unfit the soul for the mysterious reception of its heavenly Sustenance, needing to be done away, and special grace for this end to be sealed and assured,—a sacramental preparation suitable for the great sacramental gift,—it follows that a preparatory ministry is required, at once to guard the approach, and to remove the barrier, that so the penitent may without fear or scruple, and with assurance of acceptance, partake of the Divine Mysteries. If Absolution may be viewed on the one side as the extension of Baptism, it may be also regarded on the other as the anticipation of the holy Eucharist. The ordinance looks both ways, sin necessitating it in both cases ; in the one to restore grace lost or deteriorated, in the other to ensure yet greater grace to come.

A theory at variance with this view has found acceptance with some divines, which supposes that the remission of sin is bestowed sacramentally only through Baptism and the holy Eucharist. That these pre-eminent Sacraments involve this gift, because containing all the promises and graces of the new Covenant, is unquestionable ; but it is equally certain, that the Church has ever held the special ministry of remission of sins, as a sacramental ordinance, to be separate and distinct from them.

Mr. Freeman has carefully and clearly expressed this distinction, and the Church's uniform witness to its Divine appointment. "It is often objected, explicitly or otherwise,

to the Church's doctrine concerning the remission of sins through CHRIST, that it is involved in some inconsistency; in that it ascribes that effect, on the one hand, to the due reception of the Sacraments" (the two only generally necessary to salvation are here evidently meant;) "while yet on the other it recognises a personal commission, vested in a body of duly ordained men, to convey by word of mouth the same blessed reality. If the Sacraments contain in themselves full power for remission of sins, by application of the Blood of CHRIST, to what purpose, it is not unnaturally asked, 'is power and commandment' given to CHRIST's ministers to 'declare and pronounce to the penitent,' and thereby actually to convey, the 'absolution and remission of their sins?' Or again, if this latter be effectual, what place remains for the operation of the Sacraments in the matter? Why do we, after such absolution, still seek in the holy Communion 'remission of our sins' among the 'other benefits of the Passion?'"

"Now it is undeniable that our LORD did give, over and above the commission to administer the two Sacraments, a separate one, 'to remit and retain sins' by the power of the HOLY GHOST. And though it might be alleged that this was only to be exercised through the administration of the (two primary) Sacraments, it is certain that the Church has never understood it so. She has always had verbal absolutions, and never more solemn ones than in the prospect of celebration of Divine service, or in the course of it; and specially at the celebration of the Eucharist."¹

Mr. Freeman also refers to the provisions of the Levitical law,—the typical pattern of the Gospel dispensation,—in further proof of this intermediate ministry in the remission of sins. "The means by which the individual, or

¹ Principles of Divine Service, Part ii., ch. i. Theory of Eucharistic Worship, sec. 18, vol. ii., p. 255.

the congregation, obtained access, of old, to the peculiar Presence have been already dwelt upon. The Altar, it is manifest, was the way to the Presence. But which was the way to the Altar? By what rules was that way fenced about, and to whom was the guardianship of it committed? The answer is, that the 'way' was through 'the door' of the Tabernacle court, and that it was freely open to every Israelite not disqualified by breach of covenant laws; but that in case of such disqualification, of which the conscience of the worshipper was the judge in the first instance, the Priest was constituted, in a very marked manner, the dispenser of absolution from it. The offender, on becoming aware, through self-examination or the warning of others,¹ of his fault, was to bring a stated offering; and the Priest, by the prescribed methods of offering and eating, procured, and probably announced, his forgiveness. As to what constituted disqualification, there were certain plain rules laid down, while in cases of doubt or difficulty recourse was to be had to the Priest for counsel, as well as for remission." It would be superfluous to point out how exact is the correspondence between the type and the antitype, as understood in this passage.²

For reasons already given we may expect to find variations of opinion, and consequently of expression, in explain-

¹ Lev. iv. 27, 28; v. 4; x. 11; Mal. ii. 6, 7.

² Principles of Divine Service. Part ii., ch. i. Theory of Eucharistic Worship, sec. 18, vol. ii., p. 256.

I am indebted to a friend, whose name would carry with it deserved weight, for the following remarks. Referring to the spiritual results of the holy Eucharist, he observes; "Hooker indeed says; 'the effect thereof in us is a real transmutation of our souls and bodies from sin to righteousness.' B. v. ch. lxvii. § 7. But I have supposed that this statement is to be explained by the doctrine of S. Thomas, who distinctly teaches that, as deadly sin constitutes an 'impedimentum' to the vivi-

ing the rationale of Absolution. It necessarily presents itself in varying aspects to different minds, viewing it under different circumstances, one writer dwelling rather on one, another on another phase of the complex whole, while nevertheless, as differently coloured rays melt into one common light, their several views and statements may coalesce and harmonize in one truth. The Fathers were wont to represent Absolution under the instances which holy Scripture records of GOD's merciful dealing towards uncleanness in the pre-figurative appointments of the Levitical ritual, or of our LORD's miracles of healing. Thus, e.g., they likened Absolution to the Priest's judgment of the leper, or, again, to the Apostles' loosing the bands which bound Lazarus, when our LORD raised him from the dead. The one case represents Absolution as merely a declaration of what had been done, the other as an instrumental act in the chain of causes co-operating towards the fulfilment of the end.

Instances of this diversity occur in the citations of Jeremy Taylor from the writings of S. Jerome and S. Ambrose. The former commenting on S. Matt. xvi. 19, says; "In Leviticus the lepers were commanded to show themselves to the Priests, who neither make them leprous nor clean, but they discern who are clean and who are unclean. As therefore there the Priest makes the leprous clean or unclean, so

fyng and spiritual reception of the Sacrament, it cannot be considered to be remitted therein, unless in the case of a person who is guilty of sin in fact without knowing it. He holds on the other hand, that the Eucharist does do away with venial sin; as S. Ambrose seems to teach, '*iste panis quotidianus sumitur in remedium quotidianæ infirmitatis*,' in *De Sacramentis*. Sin must be forgiven before the Eucharistic Reception (whether with, or without private absolution.) The Eucharist seals the forgiveness. It makes clean the body, and washes the soul from the lesser stains which do not suspend life," &c.

here does the Bishop or the Priest bind or loose, i.e., according to their office ; when he hears the variety of sins, he knows who is to be bound, and who is to be loosed."

By the side of this statement Taylor adduces the passage of S. Ambrose previously quoted :¹ "He (S. Ambrose) adds one advantage more as consequent to the Priest's absolving of penitents ; . . . 'Men give their ministry in the remission of sins, but they exercise not the right of any power ; neither are sins remitted by them in their own, but in the Name of the FATHER, SON, and HOLY SPIRIT. Men pray, but it is GOD Who forgives : it is man's obsequiousness, but the bountiful gift is from GOD.' " S. Ambrose's "one advantage more" will be better understood from another passage, where, speaking of Absolution, he says : "At the same time note this—that GOD gives the HOLY GHOST. For this is not the work of man, nor is He given by man ; but He Who is invoked by the Priest, is imparted by GOD ; in which transaction there is GOD's gift, the Priest's ministry."² Marshall quotes this passage, grounding upon it his statement, that forgiveness is equivalent to the renewal of the SPIRIT ; "Pardon, or as S. Ambrose will . . . be found speaking, 'impart the HOLY SPIRIT,' Who is evermore supposed to enter where the sin is pardoned."³ S. Augustine, again, speaks of Absolution under the figure of Lazarus being loosed ; "Attend to Lazarus himself ; he comes forth with his bonds. He already was alive in confessing ; but as yet he walked not free, being trammelled in bonds. What then does the Church, to which was said, 'What things ye shall loose, they shall be loosed,' but that which the LORD forthwith says to the disciples, Loose him and

¹ Jeremy Taylor, *Dissuasive from Popery*, P. ii. B. i. sec. xi., vol. xi. p. 25. Heber's edit.

² *De Spir. Sanct. lib. i. c. 8 ; tom. iv. p. 15 ; ed. Ben. Ven.*

³ *Penitential Discipline*, pp. 70, 71.

let him go?"¹ The type of the Levitical Priest cleansing the leper, represents the declaratory view of absolution; that of loosing Lazarus implies an effectual act in the renewal of life, while S. Ambrose's words explain the living grace to be a direct gift of the HOLY GHOST renewing the soul, though conveyed through an earthly ministry.

These different sides of truth are not necessarily in opposition. A writer may select one aspect of a complex whole, without thereby denying other aspects of it; or the context of a passage may require one portion of the truth to be put forth in the particular connection. Thus, e.g., the definition of Absolution would necessarily vary according to the view taken of the remission of sins. If remission of sins be regarded simply as a judicial act, a pardon of the offence, then absolution is but declaratory. Pardon, under this view, is but an external fact, which the Priest attests, his sentence coinciding with the sentence of GOD. If, however, remission of sins be viewed internally, as more than mere pardon, as a communication of fresh life, then Absolution becomes a channel of quickening grace.

Again, among those who take the higher view of Absolution, as more than declaratory, some regard it as having power only to remove a spiritual barrier hindering the reception of grace afterwards to be imparted, and thus far furthering its return; others, as itself a means of imparting grace, an actual increase of spiritual life, of which the Priest's ministry is the outward form or sign.

To attribute to Absolution more than a mere declaration of forgiveness, may seem to derogate from the supremacy of GOD. But the ministry of the means of grace is not the same with the gift of grace: the channel of the current not identical with the stream. To assert for the Church's ministry a delegated instrumental power, through which

¹ Serm. lxviii. c. ii. tom. vii. P. i. col. 374; ed. Ven. 2.

GOD vouchsafes to 'act by covenanted promise, is not to claim any Divine power. "Who can forgive sins," asks S. Ambrose,¹ "except GOD alone?" but adds, "Who also forgives through those to whom He gives the power of remission." And again more fully: "But they (the Novatians) say that they do honour to GOD, by reserving to Him alone the power of remitting sins. Nay, rather none do a greater injury than they who desire to rescind His commands, to reject the charge committed to them. For when our LORD Himself in His Gospel has said, 'Receive the HOLY GHOST: whose sins ye remit, they are remitted, and whose sins ye retain, they are retained;'—which gives most honour, he who obeys the command, or he who resists it?"²

Moreover, both earlier and later theologians have grounded the truth of sacerdotal absolution on the assertion by our LORD, under the character of the "Son of Man," of a power to forgive sins "on earth,"³ supposing such assertion to have been intended by Him to show forth the commission which, first exercised by Himself in His Manhood, was after His Ascension through the Presence of the HOLY GHOST to be perpetuated by subordinate human instruments in the ministry of His Church. In claiming this power to Himself, under His human title, our LORD connects it with His Humanity, for the Name is always understood to denote His human nature and attributes, which were to be communicated from Himself to His elect according to certain laws of His own ordaining, and among others, His

¹ S. Ambrose on S. Luke v. 23; Comment. lib. v. § 13; tom. ii. p. 856.

² S. Ambrose, de Poenitentia, lib. i. c. 2, § 6; tom. iii. p. 496. Both passages are quoted by Dr. Wordsworth. Theoph. Anglic. c. xiv., Absolution.

³ S. Matt. ix. 2—8.

attribute of Priesthood, of which the ministry of the forgiveness of sins forms a material part. He exhibited in Himself under this aspect the primary instance of the Divine prerogative operating through human means, that His people might be prepared for the continued operation of the same great gift, evermore to be bestowed "on earth," (special emphasis being laid on this idea in the context,)—to be still indeed His own inalienable prerogative, but exercised mediately through others, through a line of subordinate agency, His own commissioned ministers, deriving from Himself in an unbroken continuity of living grace. His words were so understood by the bystanders; for "they marvelled and glorified God, Which had given such power unto men." Their instincts, however dimly, discerned the momentous truth, that not Himself alone individually, but a plurality of persons to be viewed as in and of Him, and one with Him, were to be commissioned from among men for perpetuating the exercise of this same healing power.¹

The maintainers of what may be called the higher view of absolution are to be found among those who are not

¹ Mr. Freeman has expressed a valuable thought on this transmission of the power of healing from our LORD to His ministers. "The Levitical Priests received their consecration in order to powers of binding and loosing, by eating of a sin-offering, and ever after discharged this part of their office by the same means, viz., eating of the sin-offerings of the people. The Apostles received the like powers for themselves and others by our LORD's *breathing* upon them: and they exercise them by the analogous power of *speech*, made effective by that one Breathing, to the loosing of sins. Nor can we fail to mark the gracious care of GOD for His wandering sheep, in thus making the re-admission of the fallen or the timorous a *personal* work: a work leaving an opening, if desired, for personal communication, reassurance, counsel, comfort." Theory of Eucharistic Worship, ch. i. sec. 18.

commonly reckoned High Churchmen. E.g., Bishop Hall, after commenting on the sacerdotal commission of remitting sins, says; "Neither is this only by way of a bare verbal declaration, which might proceed from any lips, but in the way of an operative and effectual application, by virtue of that delegate or missionary authority, which is by CHRIST entrusted with them (His ministers.) For certainly our SAVIOUR meant in these words to confer somewhat upon His ministers, more than the rest of the world should be capable to receive or perform."¹

Even Chillingworth speaks of the glorious commission, which before He (our LORD) had "given to Peter, sustaining, as it were, the person of the whole Church, whereby He delegated to them (His disciples) an authority of binding and loosing sins upon earth, with a promise that the proceedings in the court of heaven should be directed and regulated by theirs on earth."²

Divines, whom the Church of England has always acknowledged to be standards of orthodoxy, have taken this higher view. Thus Isaac Barrow, closely following the track of S. Ambrose, and connecting the grace of Absolution with that of Baptism, says; "They (Priests) remit sins *dispensativè* by consigning pardon in administration of sacraments, especially in conferring Baptism, whereby duly administered and undertaken, all sins are washed away; and absolving of penitents, wherein grace is exhibited and ratified by imposition of hands, the which S. Paul calls *χαρίζεσθαι*, to bestow grace or favour on the penitent."³

But it is more important to observe, that the Church of England herself has expressed her mind, though in simple

¹ Resolutions and Decisions, &c. Works, Hall's edit., vol. vii. pp. 452, 5.

² Serm. vii. § 11, p. 63.

³ The Power of the Keys. Works, vol. vi. p. 56.

and general statements, yet in words and under circumstances which seem reconcilable only with the highest view of this ministry. Thus, to recall expressions of her mind already quoted, the doctrine of the Homily, that "Absolution hath the promise of forgiveness of sins," implying not merely a declaration, but also an application of the promised grace; Parker's assertion, when he, as the first Primate after the Reformation, was regulating the formularies of the English Church, that it is heterodoxy to deny, that "sins are remissible by penance," implying it to be an ordinary means of remission; the refusal of the Savoy Commissioners to substitute, "I pronounce thee absolved," for "I absolve thee," thus rejecting the mere declaratory notion, and expressing a view of the ministry consistent only with the idea of spiritual inward grace being its proper result;—all alike involve a belief in the supernatural efficacy of the ordinance.

There are moreover in our Offices significant indications of the faith of our Church, that remission of sins is not a mere judicial process, terminating in a sentence of pardon, but an actual internal change from evil to good. They uniformly associate the idea of the remission of sins with this deeper view. Thus the Baptismal Office speaks of the "remission of sins by spiritual regeneration,"¹ a real effect through a real imparting of renewed life. Similarly our general forms of Absolution, specifying the grace given and sealed to the worthy recipient of the sacrament, express

¹ The term "remission of sins," may seem inappropriate in Infant Baptism, where there can be no actual "sins," only original sin, to be remitted. But the expression is here evidently taken in a wide sense as embracing generally all the blessings of redemption. The expression in the original collect, which we thus translate, is "*æternam consequi gratiam spirituali regeneratione.*" See Palmer's *Antiq. of Eng. Rit.* vol. ii. p. 174.

the same idea: "Almighty God . . . pardon and deliver you from all your sins, confirm and strengthen you in all goodness,"—words clearly implying that the remission of sin involves the removal of its power, as well as of its guilt.

That the terms of Absolution involve some positive change of state, is so strongly felt, that divines opposed to the idea of any inward spiritual grace, have suggested the explanation of a remission of ecclesiastical censures. An ordinance expressed in such high terms must, they assume, have some substantial effect on the penitent. They admit a reality and positiveness of result in the very endeavour to evade the arguments in favour of a spiritual benefit. They reject the idea of a mere declaration, and suggest a real effect, consisting in the remission of "censures." If their interpretation of "sins" to mean "ecclesiastical censures" be not allowed, these disputants may fairly be claimed as authorities in favour of the view of a real bestowal of grace; for what other result of a positive kind can be supposed?

Nor does it follow, even although through the force of contrition the forgiveness of sins has been obtained before Absolution be given, that therefore the Absolution is vain. God will surely honour His own ordinances, if used in dependence upon His promises; and the sealing of His gifts by a sacramental ministry is part of the Divine purpose. There may still be a true relation between the outward form, and the inward spiritual grace. The Absolution may be a continuance, or an increase, of the grace already bestowed; it may still be effectual for the abiding consequences of the spiritual healing. In the case of the "woman who had an issue of blood twelve years," who touched "the hem" of our LORD's garment, and at whose touch "virtue went out of Him," and "straightway the fountain of her

blood was dried up, and she felt in her body that she was healed of that plague,"—our LORD spoke the healing words after her restoration to health, as though the miracle had yet to be wrought; "Daughter, thy faith hath made thee whole; go in peace, and be whole of thy plague." He recognises the fact of her healing already accomplished,— "hath made thee whole,"—and yet at the same time He renews the assurance of the miracle, "go in peace, and be whole of thy plague."¹

A caution is here needed as to the bestowal of the grace of Absolution. It implies a spiritual capacity in the soul. Absolution, unlike Baptism, presupposes a gift of grace. There must be a regenerate nature before any effect can result from the ministration of Absolution. It is remedial, not initiatory, and thus implies a previous grace, a pre-existing fitness for its reception. On this account Absolution is never administered to the unbaptized. They may confess, but they cannot be absolved.

Some have felt scruples as to the certainty of its results to the unconfirmed, on the ground that Confirmation is the complement of Baptism, and Baptism therefore incomplete, till its first grace is perfected "with that Holy Spirit of promise." There is no ground, however, for such a scruple; for Baptism is in itself a gift of life, involving the new, the heavenly nature, and uniting the soul to GOD in CHRIST. There is thus a spiritual principle on which the grace of Absolution can act, an already existing power, and, however dormant it may have become through neglect, such as may be renewed and increased.

Only it may be that, as grace is increased in the confirmed, so Absolution meeting with a greater spiritual ca-

¹ S. Mark v. 25—34.

capacity, produces a proportionally greater result. As the sin of the confirmed is greater than the sin of the unconfirmed, because the grace sinned against is in the latter case less, so, in the same proportion, the grace of remission of sin in the confirmed may be the greater, because it falls on a soul in a higher spiritual capacity for correspondence with such grace.

Questions have also arisen as to the profitableness of Absolution to one who repeats a confession formerly made, and for which Absolution has already been given. It may be the case of the repetition of a life confession. The case supposes that no fresh sin has been committed, and therefore there can be no remission; for there is nothing on which the cleansing grace can act. But it has been shown that beside the grace of remission of sins, Absolution conveys the quickening of new life. There is a renewing as well as a cleansing gift of the Spirit involved in its ministration. Beside the moral effect therefore which may be expected to follow an act of humiliation, such as a renewed confession implies, there may be in Absolution an increase of the Spirit, imparting to the soul renewed and quickened powers of life. The one portion of the grace of absolution may be given, though there may be no need for the other, and the soul receive according to its capacity of increase.¹ There is confession for devotion's sake, as well as confession because of a smitten conscience.

A yet further and most important part of the doctrine of Absolution relates to the modes of its administration. A

¹ The only obstacles to the reception of absolution are either excess of ignorance in fundamentals, or moral incapacity, from insufficiency of repentance, shown by a refusal to make restitution, &c. Billuart (Sum. S. Thomæ) holds that ignorance of the mystery of the Incarnation or of the Holy Trinity, disqualifies from absolution (l. v. Diss. iii. Art. ii. ;)

and renew my heart by the HOLY SPIRIT, inasmuch as I do believe in and trust upon His holy Word.

"And inasmuch as you have our LORD JESUS CHRIST's command to forgive all penitents their sins, I beseech you for CHRIST's sake to teach and console me with GOD's Word, to pronounce upon me in His Name the pardon of my sins, and to give me the Body and Blood of JESUS CHRIST, to the strengthening of my faith : I will, GOD being my Helper, willingly amend my ways.

"(Here follows the *private* confession.)

"Then the confessor says,

"May GOD be merciful unto thee and strengthen thy faith. Amen.

"Dost thou believe that my absolution (pardon [Vergebung]) is GOD's absolution?

"Yes, I believe it is.

"As thou hast believed, so be it done unto thee; and I, by command of our LORD JESUS CHRIST, forgive thee all thy sins in the Name of the FATHER, and of the SON, and of the HOLY GHOST. Amen. Go in peace. Amen."

II. As a contrast to these specimens of the Lutheran practice, the following extract from a private letter illustrates the present system of so-called Confession in Presbyterian Communities based on the Calvinistic system. The account relates to the Scotch Kirk, and is written by a friend of the author, one well able to judge by personal experience of the prevailing practice. It was written in answer to an inquiry, how far confession is now known to the Kirk?

"The intending communicant must see his minister. The minister has this opportunity afforded him of rejecting unworthy persons. But supposing the respectability of the applicant to be unimpeachable, all his inquiry is directed to ascertain his religious knowledge and orthodoxy. He performs the duty of repelling those who are not found worthy, not so much as invested with individual ministerial authority, but rather as the chairman of his Kirk Session who cite and hear delinquents, sitting as a kind of committee on morals, and using their own name, coupled with that of the minister, to enforce ecclesiastical censures and decrees. The 15th Article of the Confession of Faith speaks of confession of sins to those whom men may have offended, and the consequent duty of being reconciled and receiving back to love and kindness : but not a word of sacramental confession.

"Then, again, Article XXX. on Church censures, speaks of Absolu-

sign," a characteristic which can attach only to its special individual form.

Another distinction which is of the essence of the special ministry and peculiar to it, is its judicial character. Private Absolution is appointed to be given only after special secret confession, and on the Priest's responsibility as to its rightful application, i.e., after he has had the fullest opportunity of testing the condition of the penitent, in order to form his judgment as to the fitness of exercising so solemn a trust in the particular case. It is not meant that the Priest judges of the value of the sin, so as to apportion the due amount of punishment, according to the forensic idea, as though forgiveness were co-ordinate with his sentence,—positions combated, as we have seen, of old by the mediæval, as in later years by our own, Reformers,—but that he is constituted the judge of the worth of the repentance, in order to exercise his ministry only when satisfied on this point.

Our divines frequently dwell on this distinction. Thus Usher quotes S. Gregory as showing the character of this power; "The causes ought to be weighed, and then the power of binding and loosing exercised. It is to be seen what the fault is, and what the repentance is that hath followed after the fault; that such as Almighty God doth visit with the grace of compunction, those the sentence of the pastor may absolve. For the absolution of the prelate is then true, when it followeth the arbitrement of the Eternal Judge."¹

Bishop Hall says to the same effect; "Doubtless every true minister of CHRIST hath, by virtue of this first and everlasting commission, two keys delivered into his hands:—the key of knowledge, and the key of spiritual power;

¹ Answer to a Jesuit; Of the Priest's power to forgive sin; p. 148; ed. 1624.

the one whereby he is enabled to enter and search into, not only the revealed mysteries of salvation, but also in some sort into the heart of the penitent; there discovering upon an ingenuous revelation of the offender, both the nature, quality, and degree of the sin; and the truth, validity, and measure of his repentance; the other, whereby he may, in some sort, either lock up the soul under sin, or free it from sin.”¹

Thus again Jeremy Taylor, in his *Rules of “holy dying,”* uses the term, “ordinary judge,” as synonymous with confessor.²

And again, Bishop Patrick speaks of “Absolution of penitents as a thing of great moment, which may alone be sufficient to convince you both of the dignity and the difficulty of your holy function. For what an high honour is it to be made a judge of the state of men’s immortal souls, and to pronounce a sentence upon them, according as you find them upon examination? But how industriously then ought you to labour to understand the Gospel of CHRIST, whereby you are to judge, that you may not pass a wrong sentence, through ignorance of the conditions of salvation by CHRIST.”³

And lastly, Bishop Wilson; “As under the law of Moses God made His Priests the judges of leprosy, and gave them rules by which they were to determine who were clean and fit to enter into the congregation (which was a type of heaven,) and who were not clean; even so under the Gospel He has given His Priests authority to judge sin, which is the leprosy of the soul,—has given them rules to

¹ Resolutions and Decisions of divers practical cases of conscience, case ix. Works, Hall’s edition, vol. vii., p. 1852.

² Holy Dying, c. 5, §§ 2, 4.

³ The Work of the Ministry.

judge by, with authority to pronounce their pardon if they find them qualified ; for this is their commission from CHRIST's own mouth ; ' Whosoever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them.'"¹

To the foregoing proofs of the mind of our Church on this subject may be added the comments of our Ritualists on the meaning of the language of our Offices. They vary in their expositions, but it is observable that the Ritualists of the seventeenth century,—the period which we have taken as the truest standard for ascertaining the mind of our Reformation, because the nearest to its source,—agree in ascribing to the act of Absolution a real effect of grace upon the soul of the penitent, while the earliest Ritualist of all makes a clear distinction between the general and special absolutions, representing the former as properly applicable to daily and lesser, the latter to more grave or deadly, sins.

Bishop Cosin,—whose notes on the Book of Common Prayer about to be quoted appear to have been written before 1640,² himself one of the Commissioners at the Savoy Conference,—thus explains the force of the general absolution of our daily Office ; " In which confession we remember our daily offences in general, and there is no means so powerful to obtain pardon for them, as the daily prayers of the Church to that purpose ; so that the course which our Church here prescribeth for the pardon of our daily offences, being put in practice, what can be more just, more due, than to declare that forgiveness and absolution, which those that are (as they pretend to be) penitent for those sins, do obtain ? What more comfortable, than to

¹ Parochialia, Works, vol. vii. p. 69 ; Anglo-Cath. Lib.

² See Preface to his Notes in the Library of Anglo-Catholic Theology. Cosin's Works, § 3, vol. v. p. xix.

hear the news of it from his mouth, by whom the Church ministereth these offices? What more seasonable, than to do this before we come to give GOD His solemn praise and honour in our public service, that we may be assured He accepts of the same at our hands?"¹

Of the special or private absolution, on the other hand, he says in another series of Notes on the Prayer Book, written between 1619 and 1640; "Venial sins, that separate not from the grace of GOD, need not so much to trouble a man's conscience: if he hath committed any mortal sin, then we require confession of it to a priest, who may give him, upon his true contrition and repentance, the benefit of absolution; which takes effect according to his disposition that is absolved. . . . The truth is, that in the Priest's absolution there is the true power and virtue of forgiveness, which will most certainly take effect, nisi ponitur obex, as in baptism."²

Bp. Sparrow, in his *Rationale*, published in 1657, takes the same high view of the ordinance generally, but does not distinguish between the different forms. After quoting S. John xx. 23, he says; "Which power of remitting sins was not to end with the Apostles, but is a part of the ministry of reconciliation, as necessary now as it was then,

¹ Notes. Third Series, vol. v. p. 443.

² Cosin's Works, vol. v. p. 154; First Series; Office for Visitation of the Sick.

This same belief prevails generally, as far as I am aware, among Churchmen of the present day. One whom public approval recognises among us as a faithful exponent of our Church's faith, privately thus expressed to the author his belief on this point. "I have looked on the Absolution in the Daily Service as the substitute for the Absolutio at Prime, and so, dealing as that professes to do with persons in a state of grace, refer it to venial sins. The second (the private and special form) I have regarded as authoritative, in view of the place which the precatory form holds in the Greek Church."

and therefore to continue as long as the ministry of reconciliation, that is, to the end of the world. When therefore the Priest absolves, God absolves, if we be truly penitent."¹

Sparrow however seems to have varied in his opinion, though always preserving a high view of the effects of this ordinance. In the passage referred to, he attributes an equal virtue to all our three forms; "All these several forms in sense and virtue are the same All these are but several expressions of the same thing: and are effectual to the penitent by virtue of that Commission mentioned, S. John xx." But in his sermon before the University of Cambridge in 1637, Sparrow speaks of a special Absolution to be obtained only through sacramental Confession, thus implying the same distinction between the individual and the general form, as already explained. "To put all out of doubt, let's search the Scriptures: look into S. John xx. 23; here is plainly a power of remitting sins granted to the Priest as the Fathers interpret the place, a peculiar power of pronouncing, as God's deputed judges, pardon and remission to the penitent, a power of absolving from sins in the Name of God all such as patiently confess unto them: a form of which absolution our holy Mother the Church hath prescribed in the Visitation of the Sick. . . . Now the only means to obtain this absolution, is our confession to him. The Priest may not and cannot absolve any but the penitent, nor can he know their penitence, but by their outward expression; it is God's prerogative to know the thoughts of the heart, the priest's eye cannot pierce so far, he only reads the sorrows of our hearts by our outward confession, without the which we cannot receive, nor he give, the benefit of absolution."² He here

¹ The Absolution, pp. 17, 20. Oxford edition, 1859.

² Sermon on the "Confession of Sins and the power of Absolution," pp. 16, 19.

evidently implies a special grace given under this particular form.

Comber, in his "Companion to the Temple," A.D. 1685, hands on the tradition as to the distinction between the three forms, attributing to the private form a personal assurance not attached to the others. "The judgment," he says, "of the Church of England concerning absolution may best be gathered from the Liturgy, in which are three forms of absolving set down. The first, *declaratory*," (he is evidently speaking of the general absolution at Matins and Evensong,) "which is a solemn promulgation of pardon by a commissioned person, repeated every day when the whole congregation confess their sins, wherein they are assured of forgiveness, if they repent and believe, so that to those who truly repent, it is present remission, to those who do not, it is a monitor that they may repent and this being pronounced to all the people, every one is to take his portion The second is *petitionary*, in the Communion Service, where the minister lays down the promise, and on that ground, by virtue of his own office, begs of GOD to make that promise good The third is *judiciary*, in the Office for the Sick, wherein the Priest having declared there is pardon, and prayed for the sick person, doth by GOD's authority, and as His substitute, declare him (whom he believes truly penitent) loosed from the guilt of his sins by CHRIST's merits."¹

Comber's words mark a state of transition. They are a token of the approaching decline of faith, when sacramental grace was being less appreciated ; for according to his view private absolution, though held to be judicial, and so fuller of assurance to the penitent, is yet explained to be only the declaration of the fact of forgiveness, not an instrumental cause.

It is instructive to observe how later Ritualists deviate from this traditional interpretation, which during the first century following the Reformation ruled the teaching of our Church. We have already seen the difference, as to the use of Confession, between the last and the preceding century. It is but consistent with this diminution in extent of use, that the importance previously attached to special absolution became less and less felt. The disuse of private Confession would necessarily involve the disparagement of private Absolution. But the instinct of a Church life tends so strongly to rest on the ministry of Absolution, that the result of depreciating the private, was to exalt the public, form. What was lost in the disuse of the one, was sought in the other still in constant use. What had been regarded as the peculiar prerogative of the now neglected form in the Visitation of the Sick, was transferred to those in the daily prayer and Communion Office.

Dr. Nicholls, who died in 1712, was the first to deny the characteristic grace previously thought to be connected with special Absolution. Speaking of the form in the Visitation of the Sick, he says : "It is not absolutely necessary for the forgiveness of sins," which is true, but he adds, "it is not judicial and authoritative."¹

Wheatley, whose Commentary was published in 1720, was the first to raise the general public Absolution above the private form, attributing to the former a full release from sin, and, though with evident misgiving, reducing the latter to a mere relaxation of Church censures. "It looks," he says, "as if the Church did only intend the remission of Ecclesiastical censures and bonds;" and again ; "It is only designed to remit to the Penitent the censures that may be due from the Church to his sins." But the daily general

¹ Nicholls' Commentary on the Book of Common Prayer, in loc.

absolution he explains to be, "an actual conveyance of pardon at the very instant of pronouncing it to all that come within the terms proposed."¹

Mr. Warner, in his Commentary published in 1754, adopts without any variation Wheatley's explanation of private absolution.²

Mr. Shepherd, though differing from Wheatley, yet considers this form of Absolution to be the "mere declaration of the terms of pardon to a repentant sinner."³

Lastly, Bishop Mant quotes Dean Comber and Archbishop Secker, as authorities to determine the question, leaving it to the reader to select which of the two he prefers, while Secker himself is doubtful whether to follow Wheatley's or Shepherd's interpretation, though inclining to the former. His words referring to special Absolution, are as follows; "All writers on the subject have agreed, that this Absolution was intended, which indeed is most probable, only to set persons free from any Ecclesiastical censures which they might have incurred; an indulgence granted in every age of the Church to such as were dangerously ill, on their humble request, but which is no more intended to make a change in their eternal state, than a pardon from the king is; or if it means also to declare them restored to the favour of GOD, means it only on supposition of a sincere and thorough repentance." What authority there is for saying "all writers on the subject have agreed" on this interpretation, may be judged from what has been stated in these pages. Secker closes his remarks by saying; "As this (the form of Absolution in the Visitation of the Sick) is but seldom requested, and consequently the Absolution seldom pronounced over any one, so whenever it is, it may

¹ Wheatley's Commentary, in loc.

² Warner's Illustrations of the Book of Common Prayer.

³ Shepherd's Elucidation of the Book of Common Prayer.

and ought to be accompanied with such explanations as will prevent any wrong constructions."¹

It can excite no surprise that Absolution should have been "seldom requested," if understood to be no more than "a pardon from the king," or a release from Ecclesiastical censures, when such censures had ceased to be imposed. But surely the very acknowledgment, that what the Church of all ages and many reformed Communities separate from her, have deemed to be a vital ordinance of the Gospel, had sunk so low, as to be "seldom requested, and seldom pronounced over any one," is sufficient to prove that some momentous error had, at the time, entered into the teaching, not of our Church, for this cannot change with changing times, or the fluctuations of belief or knowledge among her children, but of those who were of note and authority among her divines, and that a return to the earlier, and therefore truer, traditions of our Reformation had become urgently necessary, if the faith committed to our keeping is to be preserved.

NOTE.

THE INDICATIVE FORM OF ABSOLUTION.

The Form of Absolution used in the Church for 1200 years was simply precatory. This custom still prevails in the East, where the following form of prayer is in use at the present day in the exercise of this ministry :—

"GOD, Who by Nathan the prophet pardoned David on confession of his sins, and Peter for his denial when he wept bitterly, and the harlot who shed tears at His feet, and the Publican, and the prodigal, may the same GOD, by me a sinner, pardon thee for all thy sins in this world, and in that which is to come, and place thee uncondemned before His awful judgment seat, and, having no more even one care for the offences thou hast confessed, go in peace."²

¹ Mant's Book of Common Prayer, in loc.

² Offices of the Eastern Church. Dr. Littledale's Translations, p. 165.

It has been already observed, that the prayer now following the Absolution in our Office of the Visitation of the Sick, with the variations noted, was employed as the instrument of conveying the promised grace, from the earliest times throughout the West.

Afterwards the custom grew of adding to this deprecatory prayer the form, "*Absolvo te.*" The object of this addition was apparently to express the positive effect of the ordinance, as an authoritative declaration to assure the penitent, that he was in truth justified according to the full meaning of the petition.¹

In course of time the two forms were combined, and used together, acting and re-acting on each other, the prayer imploring the desired grace, the declaration sealing its assured possession. The opinion then grew, that the virtue of the ordinance depended on this authoritative declaration. This arose probably from the increasing prevalence of the theory, which regarded the relation of the Priest and penitent under the forensic idea: the Priest being supposed to be a judge according to the analogy of the forms of a court of law. In this view

¹ Morinus supposes that the indicative form arose from the theory, according to which it was believed, that remission of sins followed instantly upon Confession made in a state of contrition, the Absolution in such case being simply an authoritative or judicial declaration of what God had done; and that, the old tradition of forgiveness depending on the prayer of the Priest still continuing to hold its ground, the precatory form was still retained; the two thus coalescing, as expressions of two schools of opinion, or two different views of the Divine operation.

It should be added that the imposition of hands which accompanied the act of Absolution was also considered to be an outward expression and seal of prayer. "*Quid est aliud manus impositio, nisi oratio super hominem?*" says S. Augustine, (lib. 3, de baptismo contra Donatistas, c. 16.) And again, "*S. Leo, Epis. 92, manus impositionem et orationem velut unum et idem permutat, eo quod orationi manus impositio sit semper conjuncta. . . . Illi (i.e., S. Leoni) manum imponere et orare idem sunt,*" (Morinus, lib. viii., c. viii., sec. vii.) Morinus observes that both were retained,—"*priorem (the precatory form) ut oratione sacerdotis auxilium a Deo impetraretur pœnitenti, ut sufficienter ad absolutionem suscipiendam contereretur; posteriorem, ut jam contritus vere posset a sacerdote absolvi, et quod erat in cœlo solutum, in terra quoque solveretur.*" Ibid. sec. ii.

Absolution was understood to be the absolute sentence of the Priest, to be reversed only by an extraordinary interposition of superior power, and the indicative form would consequently be viewed as its essence.

The Council of Trent sealed the use of this indicative form, as the only legitimate expression of the absolving power, on the ground of its strictly judicial character. It was ruled that the words "Ego te absolvo, &c." constitute the essence of the form of Absolution, and that prayers are not necessary to the administration of the sacrament, though suitably added as its accompaniment.¹

It is difficult to reconcile this decree of the Council with the earlier Roman theory, which clearly taught, that the absolving power depended on the force of the sacerdotal prayer, accompanied as it ordinarily was with the imposition of hands, as the sign marking its personal application. Thus S. Leo uses the term, "supplicatio," as synonymous with "absolutio,"² and in his letter, already quoted, to the Bishops of Campania, speaks of the Priest being appointed to intercede with God on behalf of the penitent.

It is, however, carefully to be noted, that the virtue of the sacramental ordinance is independent of the precise form used in its administration, and therefore the definition of the Western Council im-

¹ "Docet præterea Sancta Synodus sacramenti Pœnitentiæ formam, in qua præcipue ipsius vis sita est, in illis ministri verbis positam esse; Ego te absolvo, &c., quibus quidem de Ecclesiæ sanctæ more preces quædam laudabiliter adjunguntur; ad ipsius tamen formæ essentiam nequaquam spectant, neque ad ipsius sacramenti administrationem sunt necessariæ." Sess. xiv., cap. iii.

² Morinus says of S. Leo; "Dicit Deum præsidia suæ bonitatis ordinasse, 'ut indulgentia Dei nisi supplicationibus sacerdotum nequeat obtineri.'" (Epist. 91, ad Theodorum, lib. viii. c. ix. sec. xi.) Again he quotes S. Leo: "Multum utile et necessarium est, ut peccatorum reatus ante ultimum diem sacerdotali supplicatione solvatur." (Ibid. l. viii. c. i. sec. iii.) The original passage of the letter alluded to in the text as previously quoted, is as follows: "Sufficit illa confessio quæ primum Deo offertur, tunc etiam sacerdoti qui pro delictis pœnitentium precatior accedit." Lib. viii., cap. ix. sec. xi.

Morinus concludes after arguing the question; "Oratione igitur sacramentali peccata remittuntur, et principaliter." Lib. viii., cap. xix. sec. xxi.

plies no real variance between it, and either the present Eastern use, or its own earlier practice. Our LORD was wont, in His miracles of healing, and in bestowing the grace of remission of sins, to use indifferently the indicative, the declaratory, or the precatory form. Thus, e.g., in absolving the paralytic, He uses the declaratory form, "Son, be of good cheer, thy sins be forgiven thee;"¹ in the case of the leper, the healing virtue is conveyed in the indicative form, "I will, be thou clean;"² while in raising Lazarus from the dead He employed prayer: "And JESUS lifted up His eyes, and said, FATHER, I thank Thee that Thou hast heard Me."³ The form therefore is evidently unessential. The power employed by our LORD was in each case the same. And this applies equally to the acts of His Ministers. In every case the grace flows from our LORD through their agency, whether they employ their intercessions in obtaining it, and so use the precatory form; or seal it as His gift by an authoritative declaration, and so use the declaratory form; or attest its conveyance while employing the means which He has promised to bless, and so employ the indicative form.

The intimate connection between Baptism and Absolution has already been noticed, the one being the initiatory sacrament in bestowing the graces of the Covenant, the other the means of restoring grace, when lost, or renewing it when decayed. And it is remarkable that a similar variety has obtained in the form of administration in the one case, as in the other. The form of administering Baptism was originally precatory, and this usage still obtains in the East, while the Western use has become indicative. There is no greater claim implied in the "Ego absolvo te," than in the "Ego baptizo te." In both cases alike the idea involved is not the power of bestowing grace, but only the exercise of the instrumental agency through which it is imparted by GOD according to the terms of the Covenant.

Morinus, moreover, further states his opinion, grounded on the sayings of the Fathers, that the real force of the indicative form depends on the invocation of the Name of the Blessed Trinity, which accompanies it, and that therefore it is still essentially precatory. He is speaking specially of Baptism, but applies the same principle to Absolution. "Antiqui Patres, et Græci et Latini, baptismi effectum invocationi Sanctæ Trinitatis semper attribuunt, sacerdotemque aiunt per precem et invocationem S. Trinitatis baptizare, nec aliter

S. Matt. ix. 2.

² S. Luke v. 13.

³ S. John xi. 41.

de ea formula loquuntur quam velut deprecativa." Lib. viii. c. xvi.
.sec. xviii.

It has been already shown that our English form of administering Absolution, following with certain minor variations the old Latin use, includes both special prayer and also the indicative application. First the Priest prays, "of His great mercy forgive thee thine offences," and then adds, "I absolve thee," &c.

CHAPTER XVIII.

CONCLUSION.

IT is not the object of this treatise to offer directions for the use of Confession ; to guide either the confessor, or the penitent. All that has been attempted is to trace the progress of opinion on the various questions involved in Confession, and the changes in its practice ; and especially to show how the Church of England has been guided in forming her own view, and determining the rule to be followed within her Communion. Counsels and suggestions properly belonging to pastoral theology, are beyond the purpose of this treatise. That sacramental Confession has a legitimate place in the practical system of the Church of England,—that it has retained among us a distinctive form, bearing a close affinity to the systems prevailing in other branches of the Catholic Church, and yet preserving a character of its own, suited to our habits of thought and the great principles for which amid the controversies of these latter days we contend,—that the English view is grounded on the highest authorities, sustained by both scriptural and patristic testimony,—that to restore it from its state of abeyance, is to be loyally faithful to the truest traditions of the English Reformation equally as to the far higher judgment of the undivided Church,—these important positions, the author trusts, have been established with sufficient proof.

One corollary from the conclusions at which we have arrived, may be here stated, before proceeding further. It is often urged that the system of the Church of England is cramped, unelastic, incapable of adapting itself to changing circumstances and varied phases of spiritual life;—that she bears marks of a stunted growth, her progress hopelessly checked, and herself living on mere barren theories of the past, and having no powers of onward movement, but rather ever tending to decay without the possibility of putting forth fresh germinal shoots, which are the only true signs of inherent vitality.

Now if the foregoing argument be sound and conclusive, we have a decisive instance at variance with such a view, at least in respect to the intention of our Reformation, or rather to the indications of God's merciful purpose overruling its course. For the later use of Confession is manifestly a development, taking the word in its true theological sense of adaptation of original principles to a new order of circumstances. The Church of England, acting freely, and asserting a power of judgment on the questions at issue,—practical questions such as have ever been legitimately left by Catholic use to the judgment of separate Churches—when it was clearly open to her to have made a different choice, deliberately, and with a succession of repeated decisions, chose to abide by the later use of Confession, i.e., to accept and perpetuate a development or practical adaptation of its principles, to meet the immediate needs of the Church's altered circumstances. For a momentous issue was determined in the case, and one characteristic of the English Reformation movement,—that, while firmly holding to ancient traditionary truths, its purpose was to shape and mould them so as best to satisfy real spiritual needs under new phases of life. She exercised her discretion, where discretion was strictly lawful. Having the history of th

past, as well as modern experience before her, she made her choice, not fearing to change what had been proved to be hurtful, notwithstanding its antiquity, nor scrupling to adopt and apply what was shown to be good and serviceable, although bearing on it the stamp of novelty. Such at least was the principle acted upon in the case we have been considering. And it is an instance of such an eventful kind, as to mark a purpose, a mind, intended we can hardly doubt to be applied more widely, however greatly the Church of England's course of action has been marred and hampered by the force of adverse circumstances, or failure within itself, through division, or misapprehension, or lack of faith, incapacitating her for a living earnest correspondence with the movements of the Spirit of God in His gracious purposes towards us, and through us to Christianity, and to the world.

Although, as already observed, the design of this treatise does not embrace practical directions for the use of Confession, there are yet certain principles involved in the general consideration of the subject, to which it seems needful, however briefly, to advert. It has been shown that Confession is of a sacramental character, and from this alone it would follow, that special care should be observed in its administration. This consciousness would be sufficient to regulate its outward forms, as well as the inward feelings of those engaged in it. The penitent would necessarily kneel, if at all possible, as one inwardly absorbed under the immediate Eye of God in the humble acknowledgment of sins leading to eternal separation from Him. The Priest would wear the habit of his order, his surplice and stole, sitting, as one invested with authority to judge of the state of another's soul, and using the solemn form of Absolution appointed by the Church in the "Visitation of the Sick" with the

laying on of hands, as one commissioned in the Name of God to apply the Divine promise. The penitent would kneel, not as confessing to the Priest, but to God in his presence; and make his confession, as one realizing the awful issues of the last sentence of the Almighty Judge Himself, receiving as from God what His minister is commissioned in His Name to impart. Such precautions for the formal exercise of such a transaction are important to note, if it were only to prevent the possible lapsing of so solemn an act into mere ordinary familiarity of intercourse. Still more vitally important do these outward forms of religious reverence appear, if it be considered how much the mind is influenced by outward circumstance, and how liable to forget the very meaning and purport, more especially the sacramental virtue, of the act, if divested of what is calculated to represent it to the senses as one divinely ordained.

At the same time, while it is of the utmost importance to preserve the outward ritual of this ministry, it would be unreal, not to regard a contrite expression of sin acknowledged in the least formal way, the outgushing of a burdened heart under any, the simplest, circumstances, as a true and acceptable confession. The real utterance of the heart's secret guilt is the essence of the act; the circumstances under which it is made are but the accidents. The outward mode may vary, as in extreme sickness, or sudden pressure, or other peculiarities of the individual case; the essential act may be the same. A discretion and freedom of use therefore must be left, to be determined by special circumstances, and secret guidings of the Spirit. There is an instinct which He inspires, to which such questions may be trustfully committed, while yet His guidance has led His Church to clothe her ministries with whatever of reverent or symbolic form conduces best to express their inner spiritual efficacy.

But the inward dispositions are necessarily of far graver importance, equally whether in respect of the Priest or the penitent. It is most important for the penitent to bear in mind how much of the efficacy of Confession depends on the due preparation of heart. Like all other channels of sacramental grace, Confession implies a special fitness for its reception. It is an exercise of the heart, and not a mere utterance of the lips ; and the heart must be pure before GOD in its desires and intentions, if it is to correspond with the workings of the Spirit of grace in the cleansing and renewing of its decayed or wasted powers. It ought indeed never to be forgotten, that the practical effects of Confession depend greatly on moral causes co-operating with it, on the reality and depth of faith, on true contrition and humility, as well as after diligence to sustain the soul's higher purposes. The reception of grace and its proportionate amount bear a relation to the meetness and capacity of the soul. The effect of the administration must therefore always be considered in connection with these incidental circumstances of needful dispositions, or personal qualifications. The case of those who use Confession can be rightly judged only with this larger estimate of their whole state and tendencies of life.

It follows, moreover, from the same cause, that, as regards progress in spiritual life, the degrees of the benefit to be obtained through Confession, vary according to the degrees of faithfulness. The relief from guilt does not necessarily lead on to advance in holiness, nor does freedom from individual sins necessarily involve steadfast habits of virtue. There may be an undue dependence on an outward means of grace ; and a temporary rest from sin may be an inducement too quickly to hope that discipline may be relaxed, or efforts of self-denial and self-control be spared. The fault may be ascribed to the insufficiency of the means,

when it is really due to an overweening trust in mere temporary impressions. All experience tends to show that while Confession has its own proper gifts of cleansing and quickening grace, it still leaves the soul under the necessity, as of suitable dispositions for their reception, so of constant steadfastness of self-discipline for their progressive results.

As on the part of the penitent, in order to receive the true blessing of this ministry, there needs such co-operation, and good disposition of heart, so likewise special grace is necessary for him who directs the penitent in his approach to God. What is required for the Priest is best learned by considering what is implied in the office which he is called to discharge. To act as a Confessor, implies a mind conversant with the hidden life of souls, in the many forms both of their strugglings with the powers of evil, and their progressive stages of advance in grace. It is an unworldly science, and therefore implies in the Priest a separateness from the world's life, and an eye purged to see the inner truth and love of God, in which he lives, as his habitual sphere of thought and feeling. Spiritual knowledge and a growing acquaintance with scientific and practical Divinity is of the utmost moment to furnish the Confessor with the instruments of his science ; but beyond all such knowledge, a pure heart, and the simplicity of the mind of Jesus, are of the greatest price, and in themselves a treasury of wisdom for guiding the souls of others, as in guiding and guarding one's own.

The relation in which the Confessor stands towards the penitent, is not of this world, and has many sides and points of attachment, which necessarily elicit feelings unlike those which consecrate the ties of ordinary intercourse. For the Confessor is the chosen friend of the soul ; the most intimate confidant of its secrets ; the physician, the comforter, the witness for God to the state of the soul,

whether for judgment or for mercy. It is his charge to give hope, or to work fear, to raise up or to cast down, to inspire peace or to arouse anxious searchings, to open heaven or to point to hell, and thus, whether in sorrow or in joy, to bear another's burden of life, to share its varying experiences, its terrors of despair or its ecstasies of divine consolation. Trusted with such a charge the Confessor becomes by the soul's willing choice, the father and the guide, the representative of the tenderness and the love of CHRIST, in that higher sphere of our existence, where even now, in some degree at least, time is lost in eternity, and the everlasting issues of human conduct are shaping themselves before the all-seeing Eye according to the irreversible sentence of the Judge. It must surely be the purpose of GOD that whosoever is called to such a charge should have learnt the lessons needed for the salvation, and growth in grace, of his own soul. For how otherwise can he become the guide of another? But his support and refuge, under the consciousness which none can fail to experience of unfitness and insufficiency, will lie in this,—that GOD is present in His own ordinances ; that as it is His voice alone which can speak peace, or awaken godly sorrow, so His Spirit may be hoped for to supply or correct the failings of His servants. Only in the consciousness of the nearness of GOD, and the constant aids of His Presence, can either the Priest or the penitent hope, that a ministry which applies the laws of the Divine life to the inmost depths of souls in all their manifold individual peculiarities, can be blessed and prospered. Only in this conviction can it be rightly approached ; but such faith will ever discern Him working both in those whom He sends to minister, and those whom He draws through their means to Himself.

It is often urged against the revival of this ministry, that it is, to say the least, inexpedient and unsafe among our-

selves in consequence of the want of experience in the great majority of our Priesthood. But this defect, if it be so, can only be regarded as a temporary difficulty; and if the revived use of Confession is in itself to be desired, it is surely better that the inconvenience be borne and the risk run, which is but for a season, rather than forego the certain benefit, which will be lasting. Moreover, if the Church enjoin her Priesthood to be ready to receive Confessions, and in certain cases even to urge the practice, and the people are desirous of seeking it according to her express appointments, it is not a question of preference, but of duty and of principle. The call is too clear, and the issue too important, to allow of any shrinking because of some possible danger, in order to obtain so great a good, and be faithful to the plain injunctions of the Church. And it is surely a case for trust, that He Who has awakened the desire for the restoration of so clearly ordained a ministry in His Church, will enable His ministers, if they diligently seek to prepare themselves, to fulfil it with His blessing; will supply their defects, and will not suffer His people to lose the benefits they seek, through any lack, or imperfections of service. There is special grace promised to the Priesthood for the fulfilment of their office, to aid their efforts in preparing themselves for its due discharge, to guide them on the special occasions of its exercise, and to work through them (themselves, it may be, wholly unconscious of what is secretly passing through their instrumentality) what He wills for His own glory to impart to His elect.

That the habit of receiving confessions, would be an incalculable advantage to the Parish Priest, re-acting on himself in the deepening of his own life, ensuring a truer, more intimate and more affectionate knowledge of the souls of his people, and of the working of the grace of

God in them, infusing greater reality and power into his teaching, and generally making his cure of souls a more personal and individualising, and therefore a more real and profitable, work,—can hardly be questioned. Nor can it fail to be a matter for anxiety and regret, that so much of pastoral intercourse among us is simply external, confined merely to kindly offices of charity, or at best, periodical instructions sown broadcast, without the means of knowing the special needs or aims of those for whose benefit they are with so much laborious diligence prepared.

It must be a sad reflection to many a Parish Priest, how continually souls pass from beneath his care into eternity, without the power of applying to them any means of grace, which yet he longs to impart, and in perfect uncertainty, if not entire hopelessness, as to their state. To have known the secrets of their consciences would have opened the way possibly to all the saving ministries of the love of CHRIST, and proved the turning-point between death and life. What but Confession can meet such cases as these? Nor is it merely the question of the multitudes whose very salvation is at stake. Many of our regular communicants wholly stagnate in their interior lives, and even gradually slide back from their early love, and incipient fervours, because they lack stimulus, and are left entirely to themselves. A Christianity without rule and without guidance, and thus too often without progress, is the effect of losing that personal application of the pastoral ministry which Confession ensures.

Moreover, it may be well to remark that a very simple mode of dealing may quite suffice for all ordinary cases such as occur in general pastoral visiting. Special cases no doubt need a special fitness. There are characters and cases of conscience, which require more than ordinary acquaintance with the laws of the spiritual life, and an en-

larged experience, in order to avoid the risk, it may be, of most serious and lasting injury, when yet the purest intentions may animate the confessor. As in all other sciences, so in the science of souls, the more subtle and complicated the organization, or the disorder, may be, the more fatal any mismanagement will prove. But such cases are the exception. The sins to which men are ordinarily exposed, as well as their varying conditions of character, so far at least as the conduct and habits of their lives are concerned, are within the scope of any faithful pastor, qualified to deal in an effectual way with the interior state of his people. Nor is there any difficulty in applying the simple rules of the Church's ministry. Let the Priest only consider the circumstances of any case that he has in hand, and the sins likely to beset the calling, the age, and other like peculiarities of the person,—then lead him to reflect and examine whatever may weigh upon his conscience, and the sure consequences of sins not repented of and forgiven,—and then speak to him of the Church's ordained means of ensuring forgiveness, and point to the passages in the Prayer Book, referring to it, and their natural application. A few chief sins only may at first be mentioned ; but the way being opened and the relief felt, a wholly different kind of intercourse will have been established, a freedom of entering into yet closer searching of the heart will become comparatively easy, and a recourse readily had, if not periodically, yet in any special need, to what has been experienced already as GOD's own instrument of peace and renewed life. The words of absolution once heard can hardly be forgotten, and their solemnity will ever be felt as a sufficient reason for giving to the act of confession as great a sacredness, and as reverent a form, as it is possible to impart. A sense of power will grow with use, and a higher, more unearthly consciousness as to his whole ministry will be the sure reward of the Priest,

as well as a hope of saving souls, such as he never before had tasted or thought possible.

Many, no doubt, are deterred by unnecessary scruples or shyness, when a few words simply spoken would meet with a response bespeaking a heart already prepared. Many may be misled by the supposition that some very unusual amount of special study or formal training is requisite in all cases to deal thus scientifically, so to speak, with the souls of others, who yet would find how readily experience and the thoughtful care of their own lives unlock the secrets of at least the simpler needs of others' consciences awakened to seek God. At the same time it may be well to add, that nothing that has been said is meant in the slightest degree to diminish the sense of caution and considerateness in venturing to exercise so critical a ministry, or the awe which can hardly fail to grow and increase in an earnest man entering into the sanctuary of another's soul, with all its vast and endless interests, thus trustfully made dependent upon his influence. A Priest who receives confessions will often learn the value of consultation with others more experienced than himself. Nor seldom may he also feel the need, or at least the desire, if the power be withheld, of committing the care of some who seek his ministry, to those whom special aptitude has marked out as more likely to discharge it aright.

Perhaps it may be advisable to make the further suggestion, that one who receives confessions should surely be led himself to use confession. We can hardly recommend to others what we know not of, either in its trials or its benefits. There seems a peculiar fitness, that in becoming a channel of sacramental grace to others, one should drink of its living waters oneself. A further need for such use arises from the circumstance, that the personal experience of the discipline involved in Confession, on moral grounds, can alone enable one to advise, with any practical confidence ; and a con-

fessor is unavoidably called on to advise those who seek his aid in their strivings against sin.

For Priests who may in any way be called on, perhaps suddenly and unexpectedly, to discharge this most momentous function of their office, amid continual anxious searchings of heart, the true repose is to be found in the boundless and tender mercies of GOD, and in earnest prayer, that He may avert any evil which might, through their fault, afflict those whom He purposed to bless. But they are surely bound to do all that lies in their power to furnish themselves with all available means, so as best to meet a need which manifestly is being felt among us more and more, and which as certainly they ought, as a main part of their solemn charge from GOD, to supply. Their support and encouragement is to be found in the glory, wherewith the Priest is girt about as the commissioned minister of the Most High GOD, endued with special gifts of His Spirit, Which from our LORD's own lips was breathed first upon the Apostles, and the pulsations of Whose creative and inspiring Breath still thrill through each one, on whom the Shadow of His Hand, sealing us in our ministry, has rested. With the momentous charge there is surely grace given, ever sufficient to aid effectually our own efforts, even as it prevented our earliest thoughts of self-devotion. Almighty GOD gives aid according to the needs of His faithful ones, and special strength and guidance for the special ends to which He calls and sends forth individual members of the mystical Body of His SON. How surely may we trust that He will fulfil this promise, when it concerns not only the individual possessors of His gifts, but others, even all to whom they are sent, and His own glory above all in the building up of His Church to be the recompense of His Passion, the price of His own Blood ! That our Church, in common with the whole Catholic Communion, has fully be-

lieved in a special grace, as the ground of its hope for the fulfilment of the ministry committed to it, is not to be questioned. This confidence breathes throughout the forms in which the gift of holy Orders is conveyed ; for what else is involved in the awful, but most gracious charge, "Receive the HOLY GHOST?" In this assurance alone could one, "compassed with infirmity," and "of like passions with" his brethren, dare to tread within the sanctuary, and bear the weight of the sins of others, ever responsible before GOD, not only for the saving of his own soul, but of theirs also.

Many are the encouraging words which convey to us the assurance with which the priestly ministry is sent forth, words specially intended to strengthen us for the particular Office which we have been contemplating. Such, e.g., are Dean Comber's stirring expressions which should be imprinted on the heart of every Priest. "Let the pastor firmly believe, that so much of the HOLY GHOST and His gifts are now (when the words are said at the laying on of hands, 'Receive the HOLY GHOST,' &c.) imparted to him, as are necessary for the discharge of the office to which the SPIRIT hath called him, so much as will qualify him to judge so rightly concerning remitting and retaining sins, that GOD may ratify his sentence in heaven, forgiving those he declares penitent, and condemning such as he pronounces impenitent ; and this will make him careful in his managing of sinners, and bring a great and deserved veneration upon all his solemn acts of ecclesiastical discipline, as well as an incredible benefit to his people's souls."¹

Hooker, likewise, while solemnly reminding us of the momentous charge laid upon us, speaks with his wonted eloquence of the preternatural powers given to sustain it, and with his authoritative and impressive witness this

¹ On the Office for making Priests, p. 363. Companion to the Temple.

treatise may well be brought to a close. "Besides that the power and authority delivered with those words is itself *χάρισμα*, a gracious donation which the SPIRIT of GOD doth bestow, we may most assuredly persuade ourselves that the hand which imposeth upon us the function of our ministry doth under the same form of words so tie itself thereunto, that he which receiveth the burden is thereby for ever warranted to have the SPIRIT with him and in him for his assistance, aid, countenance, and support, in whatsoever he faithfully doth to discharge duty. Knowing therefore that when we take ordination we also receive the presence of the HOLY GHOST, partly to guide, direct, and strengthen us in all our ways, and partly to assume unto itself for the more authority those actions that appertain to our place and calling, can our ears admit such a speech uttered in the reverend performance of that solemnity, or can we at any time renew the memory and enter into serious cogitations thereof, but with much admiration and joy? We have for the least and meanest duties performed by virtue of ministerial power, that to dignify, grace and authorize them, which no other offices on earth can challenge. Whether we preach, pray, baptize, communicate, condemn, give absolution, or whatsoever, as disposers of GOD'S mysteries, our words, judgments, acts and deeds, are not ours, but the HOLY GHOST'S."¹

¹ Eccl. Pol., b. v. c. lxxvii. 8.

APPENDIX.

THE following Declaration was issued in 1873 on occasion of much public discussion.

*Declaration on Confession and Absolution, as set forth by the
Church of England.*

WE, the undersigned, Priests of the Church of England, considering that serious misapprehensions as to the teaching of the Church of England, on the subject of Confession and Absolution, are widely prevalent, and that these misapprehensions lead to serious evils, hereby declare, for the truth's sake, and in the fear of GOD, what we hold and teach on the subject, with special reference to the points which have been brought under discussion.

1. We believe and profess, that Almighty GOD has promised forgiveness of sins, through the Precious Blood of JESUS CHRIST, to all who turn to Him, with true sorrow for sin, out of unfeigned and sincere love to Him, with lively faith in JESUS CHRIST, and with full purpose of amendment of life.

2. We also believe and profess, that our LORD JESUS CHRIST has instituted in His Church a special means for the remission of sin after Baptism, and for the relief of consciences, which special means the Church of England retains and administers as part of her Catholic heritage.

3. We affirm that—to use the language of the Homily—“Ab-

solution hath the promise of forgiveness of sin,"¹ although, the Homily adds, "by the express word of the New Testament it hath not this promise annexed and tied to the visible sign, which is imposition of hands," and "therefore," it says, "Absolution is no such Sacrament as Baptism and the Communion are."² We hold it to be clearly impossible, that the Church of England in Art. xxv. can have meant to disparage the ministry of Absolution any more than she can have meant to disparage the Rites of Confirmation and Ordination, which she solemnly administers. We believe that GOD through Absolution confers an inward spiritual grace and the authoritative assurance of His forgiveness on those who receive it with faith and repentance, as in Confirmation and Ordination He confers grace on those who rightly receive the same.

4. In our Ordination, as Priests of the Church of England, the words of our LORD to His Apostles—"Receive ye the HOLY GHOST ; whosoever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them, and whosoever sins ye retain, they are retained,"—were applied to us individually. Thus it appears, that the Church of England considers this Commission to be not a temporary endowment of the Apostles, but a gift lasting to the end of time. It was said to each of us, "Receive the HOLY GHOST for the office and work of a Priest in the Church of GOD, now committed unto thee by the imposition of our hands ;" and then followed the words, "Whose sins thou dost forgive, they are forgiven, and whose sins thou dost retain, they are retained."³

5. We are not here concerned with the two forms of Absolution which the Priest is directed to pronounce after the general confession of sins in the Morning and Evening Prayer, and in the Communion Service. The only form of words provided for us in the Book of Common Prayer for applying the absolving power to individual souls, runs thus :—"Our LORD JESUS CHRIST, Who hath left power to His Church to absolve all sinners who truly repent and believe in Him, of His great Mercy forgive thee thine offences ; And by His authority committed to

¹ Homily "of Common Prayer and Sacraments."

² Ibid.

³ "The Form and Manner of Ordering of Priests."

me I absolve thee from all thy sins, in the Name of the FATHER, and of the SON, and of the HOLY GHOST. Amen."¹ Upon this we remark, first, that in these words forgiveness of sins is ascribed to our LORD JESUS CHRIST; yet that the Priest, acting by a delegated authority, and as an instrument, does through these words convey the absolving grace; and, secondly, that the absolution from *sins* cannot be understood to be the removal of any censures of the Church, because (*a*) the sins from which the penitent is absolved are presupposed to be sins known previously to himself and GOD only; (*b*) the words of the Latin form relating to those censures are omitted in our English form; and (*c*) the release from excommunication is in Art. xxxiii. reserved to "a Judge that hath authority thereunto."

6. This provision, moreover, shows that the Church of England, when speaking of "the benefit of absolution," and empowering her Priests to absolve, means them to use a definite form of absolution, and does not merely contemplate a general reference to the promises of the Gospel.

7. In the Service for "the Visitation of the Sick" the Church of England orders that the sick man shall even "*be moved* to make a special Confession of his sins, if he feel his conscience troubled with any weighty matter." When the Church requires that the sick man should, in such case, be moved to make a special Confession of his sins, we cannot suppose her thereby to rule that her members are bound to defer to a death-bed (which they may never see) what they know to be good for their souls. We observe that the words, "be moved to," were added in 1661, and that therefore at the last revision of the Book of Common Prayer the Church of England affirmed the duty of exhorting to Confession in certain cases more strongly than at the date of the Reformation, probably because the practice had fallen into abeyance during the Great Rebellion.

8. The Church of England also, holding it "requisite that no man should come to Holy Communion, but with a full trust in GOD's mercy, and with a quiet conscience," commands the Minister to bid "any" one who "cannot quiet his own con-

¹ "The Order for the Visitation of the Sick."

science herein," to come to him, or "to some other discreet and learned Minister of GOD'S Word, and open his grief; that by the ministry of GOD'S Holy Word he may receive the benefit of absolution, together with," and therefore as distinct from, "ghostly counsel and advice;"¹ and since she directs that this invitation should be repeated in giving warning of Holy Communion, and Holy Communion is constantly offered to all, it follows that the use of Confession may be, at least in some cases, of not unfrequent occurrence.

9. We believe that the Church left it to the consciences of individuals, according to their sense of their needs, to decide whether they would confess or not, as expressed in that charitable exhortation of the First English Prayer Book, "requiring such as shall be satisfied with a general Confession, not to be offended with them that do use, to their further satisfying, the auricular and secret Confession to the Priest; nor those also, which think needful or convenient, for the quietness of their own consciences, particularly to open their sins to the Priest, to be offended with them that are satisfied with their humble confession to GOD, and the general Confession to the Church: but in all things to follow and keep the rule of charity; and every man to be satisfied with his own conscience, not judging other men's minds or consciences; whereas he hath no warrant of GOD'S Word to the same." And although this passage was omitted in the second Prayer Book, yet that its principle was not repudiated, may be gathered from the "Act for the Uniformity of Service," (1552) which, while authorizing the second Prayer Book, asserts the former book to be "agreeable to the Word of GOD and the primitive Church."

10. We would further observe, that the Church of England has nowhere limited the occasions upon which her Priests should exercise the office which she commits to them at their ordination; and that to command her Priests in two of her Offices to hear confessions if made, cannot be construed negatively into a command not to receive confessions on any other occasions. But, in fact, (see above No. 7, 8,) the two occasions specified do

¹ Exhortation in the Service for Holy Communion.

practically comprise the whole of the adult life. A succession of Divines of great repute in the Church of England, from the very time when the English Prayer Book was framed, speak highly of Confession, without limiting the occasions upon which, or the frequency with which it should be used ; and the 113th Canon, framed in the Convocation of 1603, recognized Confession as a then existing practice, in that it decreed under the severest penalties, that "if any man confess his secret and hidden sins to the Minister for the unburdening of his conscience, and to receive spiritual consolation and ease of mind from him ; . . . the said Minister . . . do not at any time reveal and make known to any person whatsoever any crime or offence so committed to his trust and secrecy, (except they be such crimes as by the laws of this realm his own life may be called into question for concealing the same)."

11. While then we hold that the formularies of the Church of England do not authorize any Priest to teach that private Confession is a condition indispensable to the forgiveness of sin after Baptism, and that the Church of England does not justify any Parish Priest in requiring private Confession as a condition of receiving Holy Communion, we also hold that all who, under the circumstances above stated, claim the privilege of private Confession, are entitled to it, and that the Clergy are directed under certain circumstances to "move" persons to such confession. In insisting on this, as the plain meaning of the authorized language of the Church of England, we believe ourselves to be discharging our duty as her faithful Ministers.

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